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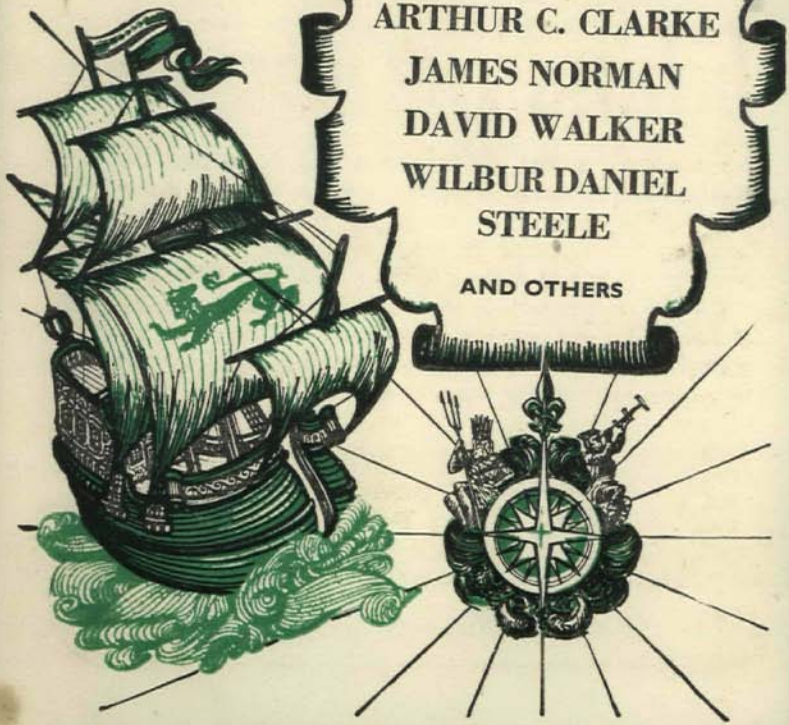

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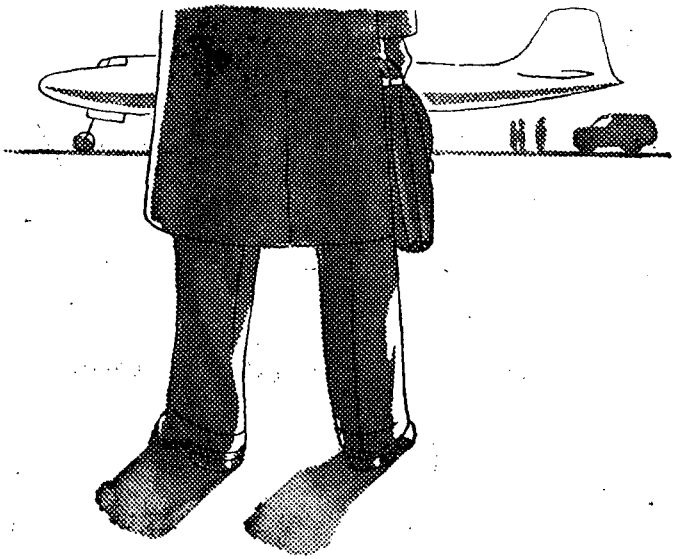

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# ARGOSY

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# PEACOCK of JAVA

*I THOUGHT of the mariners of Solomon,*
*Who, on one of their long voyages, came*
*On that rare bird, the Peacock*
*Of Java, which brings even*
*To the tree of heaven, heaven.*

*How struggling upward through the dark*
*Lianas, they beheld the tree*
*And in the tree, the fan*
*That would become a king's embroidery.*

*How they turned and on the quiet*
*Water then set sail*
*For home, the peacock's tail*
*Committed to the legends of the sea.*

WILLIAM JAY SMITH

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# Spanish Garden

**Her dark eyes smiled at him elusively filled with a secret shining**

by DAPHNE K. FORSTER

HE had come to paint. That was nothing new. He was often coming somewhere or other to paint.

The fishing villages of Brittany knew him, Capri, and the heavenly Canary Islands. He resided in Spain, in villages out of Marseilles and along the French and Italian Riviera. Many of his pictures were hung; critics said of them that he spilt all the colours from his palette on his canvases, mixed them, and brought the whole to life in vivid, glowing scenes.

Colour was his strong point. When he painted, it was stone courtyards drenched with sunshine, white châteaux that shimmered under stark blue skies, children frolicking in the Mediterranean sun, oxen plodding along an olive-chequered road, the indolent hour of the siesta.

He painted fairs, and the rumble-tumble of a merry-go-round, country weddings, and swirling dancers with castanets. He might have been called "the wizard of the spectrum," for that was what he was—until his last picture.

This was different from the others. The colour was there, massed and burning, even the spray from the cool, white fountain was jewelled but there was something about the whole grouping that his other pictures had lacked: a mood, a sadness. Critics could not make up their minds about it, except on one point, that it was his best work to date. The exquisite face of the Spanish lady, her blue-black hair gleaming through her mantilla as she looked out from the green peep-window of the house—was she secretly amused, calculating, bored, or awaiting a lover? She was the focal point of the picture, yet her faint Mona Lisa smile gave nothing away.

The artist had named his picture "Spanish Garden." A wag declared it should have been called "Up the Spanish Garden Path"—which was where the artist seemed to be leading his public. Only a few knew the real story . . .

He had come to paint. The sleepy old Spanish town seemed to him just the place to do it. He had scarcely walked out of his

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pension where he left his haversack and painting material, when all manner of possible subjects presented themselves. The back of the lemon-coloured pension sloped down to an incredibly blue sea fringed by a shining beach. Sun-blackened children played on the beach, and two boatmen, stripped to the waist, sang as they tinkered with their red, sun-blistered boat.

He had seen it all before and, turning his back on it, he decided to investigate farther inland. Along narrow, shadowy by-streets he strode, where suddenly through a gap in the houses glimmered the startlingly blue sea. Women looked out from their half-opened doorways and a few stared boldly at the tall, bronzed foreigner—as colourful in himself as his surroundings, with his blue eyes, auburn hair and beard, open-necked green cotton shirt, and faded green trousers.

Town and sea dropped behind as he followed a road that curved leisurely upward. The almendros flowered on either hand. Beyond a bougainvillaea-matted wall ran a shorter, steeper incline. Here lived the wealthy residents, some of whom probably came from Madrid or Seville for their holidays.

They were old houses, secluded and cool behind their white walls with, he expected, the usual formal gardens and courtyards. They gave no sign of life, but that was not unusual, when in the town itself leisure predominated. A cypress or two stood out in sombre contrast.

His tread was quiet in the dust of the roadway, and he walked slowly, imbibing the peace. One of the larger houses had a conventlike wall, several feet high. In the wall was a door and the door was open.

A glimpse showed him the jet of a fountain against banks of flowers. He stopped and looked closer. The massed rainbows of flowers surrounded a mosaic courtyard where fat pigeons strutted, cooing and bowing to each other. They were either too fat or too lazy to fly, and when the spray from the fountain fell on them they merely shook their wings and hopped out of its reach.

It was a gem of a setting. With scarcely a thought, he pushed the door wider and entered. The rasping creak of the door brought him back to convention and good manners. He must ask permission if he wished to paint a private garden. As he looked around he discovered an old man, bowed among his flower-beds, gnarled and earthy as a tortoise.

"Buenos dias," he said affably, and proceeded in his stilted Spanish to explain that he would like to paint the garden.

With the ponderous gait of a tortoise, the old man approached, cupping his ear; and he had to explain all over again. Even then

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he received no reply, merely a gesture which his eyes followed: and it was then that he saw her at the green postigo.

A lovely Spanish girl with a coil of shining blue-black hair, her dark eyes fixed in apprehension on him. There was little doubt that she was afraid—possibly at the intrusion of this bearded stranger into her sanctum—that sanctum of chaperons and female relatives surrounding a Spanish girl.

It became of paramount importance to reassure her, not only because he wished to paint her garden, but because on principle he disliked women being frightened, and she was an exquisite creature. He bowed low and then repeated gently, with a few more frills, what he had told the old tortoise.

He saw her change, at first so subtly that a person not used to studying the concealments and disclosures of faces, might not have noticed it. He congratulated himself on his manner of approach, for she smiled, showing small white teeth, her scarlet lips parted and reminding him of the flesh of some warm, luscious fruit. " If you will wait a moment, señor," she said, " I will come down."

He bowed again, surprised at his theatrical formality, yet finding it natural to his surroundings. For there never was such a garden with its mixture of flamboyance and peace, its rich burgeoning and indolence. Waiting, he grew almost drunk on the thick scents of datura and heliotrope, the perfume of the santa noche and of gay, exotic lilies. She kept him waiting a long time, and he moved into the shade of a cypress, looking about him through the narrowed eyes of an artist.

After a while he sensed that he was being watched; as if several pairs of eyes were observing him closely. That did not surprise him, for down in the town his tall, blond figure caused many peepings and giggles from half-opened doors and windows. Yet a glance over the façade of the house revealed nothing, no movement from behind the shutters, drooped like half-closed eyelids.

He began to think the Spanish lady had changed her mind, or that some aunt or cousin, or perhaps a mother or older sister had curbed her impetuosity, and advised her to leave the foreigner to cool his heels. The deaf old tortoise had worked his way farther down the garden and was utterly indifferent.

How long did one wait for a lady? That depended of course on the lady and how much one expected to get from the meeting. The answer in this case was obvious. Both lady and garden were beautiful. But patience has its limits, and if they thought they were going to make a fool of him . . .

He strode towards the front door

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Intercepting him, appearing it seemed from nowhere, though it was actually by way of a concealed side entrance, stood the Spanish lady. Her hair was covered with a black lace mantilla, in the conventional style, and at close quarters she was young and lovelier then ever.

He stopped with an exclamation, for she might have been a sprite appearing out of the ground at his feet. He must have surprised her as well. She started, and this time there was no mistaking the sudden fear in her eyes.

He did not bow again but said, " Forgive me, señorita, I thought you had forgotten all about my request, so I was coming to your door to ring your bell and ask again. I regret my impatience."

" You are artista? Americano? " Her Spanish was soft and slow, but her dark eyes moved over him like a rake.

He told her he was English.

" Ah, Eenglish! " She raised her eyes to his; they were no longer frightened or suspicious, but there was eagerness in them and a secret shining.

" Artista—" she said, and her hand went up to her lace mantilla—" that is why I wear this. Artists like to see Spanish ladies with their mantillas."

" Thank you, señorita. I am honoured. It is *señorita*—? " he asked.

She nodded. " Sí." The secret shining was still in her eyes.

He felt a relief, an exultation which, he told himself, must be common to any bachelor when he learns that a woman he finds eminently desirable is unmarried. Not that he had ever experienced it before. But the feeling was understandable. At least she was free to choose whom she wanted.

Then he remembered that he had come to paint . . . She told him that she did not speak English, so they talked—he in his makeshift Spanish, and she in the simple slow speech of an adult with a young child. They laughed gently at each other, even teasing each other a little, while he told her how he could paint nothing until he had seen her garden and that he was living in a pension by the sea, but had a house of his own in Cornwall, one of the loveliest counties in England.

She asked him by which route he had come to Spain—by sea or la frontera.

" The frontier," he told her, " across from France."

" *La frontera!* " She said it in bated breath, as though it were a bastion he had scaled, and he got the impression that his coming across the frontier raised him in her estimation.

After a while, he began to wonder how a well-bred Spanish girl could chat to a total stranger, without some sort of duenna.

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The house, she then told him, belonged to an uncle in Madrid. It was his seaside residence, and as she had been ill, her family had given her permission to come on a holiday with only a maid and—she jerked her head in the direction of the tortoise—old Pedro. They were faithful servants and took care of her. "So you understand, señor, that I cannot invite you inside. But you may certainly paint the garden. Pedro shall be told, and he will let you in whenever you choose to come."

A princess in a tower. It is doubtful if she ever walked down to the town without her maid. No wonder she had at first been afraid of him and that to her "la frontera" sounded as dread as the river Styx.

He thanked her again and with sudden courage made his further request: would she allow him to paint her as well—the beautiful señorita in her garden?

She blushed and nodded assent.

"Just as you are dressed, señorita," he said, "and where I first saw you—at your green postigo."

He knew that this picture was going to be different from his others. He began to paint it without a trace of shadow, that inner shadow of the mind which can cast its uncertainties or sadness on any creative interpretation. His picture was conceived and born of sun—the massed flowers burning in their colours, the white fountain with its shimmering spray, and the fat, sun-flecked pigeons. It was when he came to the cypress trees that shadows perforce entered his picture—and his mind. For by then he loved the señorita with her raven hair and elusive, unfathomable smile, and his love was not without misgiving.

How would her family react to her marrying an artist, even one as successful as he? Spanish girls were very much influenced by their families. Would she be happy if he transplanted her to a harsher climate?

He had met and admired many beautiful women, but never one to love, and until now his carefree gipsy existence had sufficed. But now for her sake he would give up everything and settle in Spain if she wanted it.

She leaned out over her flowers, like some rarer exotic flower, and he painted her with tenderness and doubt.

It became their rule to break off at a certain time each day and wander through the garden, talking. The picture grew slowly, while the old tortoise, working among the flower-beds, and cupping his ear if ever addressed, made a perfect chaperon.

Reality stepped in, as he knew it would, sooner or later. The indecisive dream of garden and beautiful, unattainable Señorita

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had to end. She asked one day how much longer the picture would take.

"A few more touches, señorita, and alas! it is finished."

"I must leave," she said in a troubled voice. "My uncle in Madrid, and my family want me back."

In a tumbling spate of broken Spanish he told her of his love and how he wished to marry her and take her with him to England or—if it would make her happier—settle in her country and take her on visits to his.

She listened with downcast eyes, and but for a quiver of her long lashes, her face was expressionless. But when he began to tell her about himself and what little fame he had, explaining it all honestly, as he felt he should, she cut him short with, "That does not matter, señor. It is enough that you wish to marry me."

Her eyes as she lifted them to him, were filled with their secret shining, and he knew to his unutterable happiness and relief, what her answer would be. His good fortune overwhelmed him. It seemed incredible how he had found her, and painted the best picture of his career, and wooed and won her, all within a small enchanted space of time. Even his optimism could not embrace so much at once.

But there she was, looking at him with shining eyes, and a grave little smile, and he took her in his arms.

Gently, she disengaged herself, shyly indicating the old tortoise, and he had to be content with kissing her hand. A small hand: as he took his lips away from it, he noticed an ugly scar running across the bottom of the palm and round the base of the thumb. It looked like the mark left by a bullet which had ripped its way through the flesh, for it was not a burn nor a healed knife-wound.

Shocked at such desecration, he stared unbelievingly at it, and she pulled her hand quickly away, and looked towards the old tortoise. Either her vanity was hurt that he should have seen her disfigurement, or else it was connected with some experience she wished to forget. Some day, he hoped, she would tell him about it. In the meantime he pretended not to have seen what it was obvious she would rather he did not see.

She talked quickly then, so that he followed with difficulty, but he understood enough to realize that her family, as he had guessed, would be the obstacle, that indeed they already had plans for her marriage.

To all his suggestions that he should visit them or write to them, she shook her head. "No good. You do not know my father. He would send me to aunts and far-away relatives, and

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you would never find me again." Her eyes brimmed with tears. "Ah, querido mio—my father—you do not know!"

"But there must be a way," he persisted, "if we love each other. All I want is to marry you."

She came very close to him, losing her shyness and not caring about the old tortoise. He drew her to him and she rested her head on his shoulder. Again and again he kissed her mouth, soft and scarlet, like some luscious fruit. At last she whispered, "If you could take me across la frontera, then we could find a priest and be married at once, and after that we could go together to your home in England."

"Elope!" He laughed happily and kissed her again. "Of course it's the answer," and he was overjoyed that for all her demureness and chaperons, the suggestion should have come from her. "Fait accompli—that's French, my darling, and it means once a deed's done, it's done—that from your family's point of view, it will be crying over spilt milk—that—Oh, hang what it means! I shall have you and that's all that matters. Why shouldn't we find a priest here to marry us before we leave?"

She grew frightened at that. "Not here," she said, "it is too close—anything might happen and my family might find out beforehand and stop it. But across la frontera and out of Spain—then!" Her eyes sparkled once more.

"As you say. So long as you trust me."

"Love always trusts, vida mia, and I love you . . ." She left his embrace, threw a glance at the tortoise, who was tactfully working with his back to them, and said, "But it must be soon—my family have written for my return at the end of the week."

"As soon as you like," he said.

"We shall meet here—I shall stay by the door in the wall, the way you entered. That way it is easy to come and go You must come for me when it is my time to retire, then my escape will not be discovered till—" She stopped suddenly and gave a gasp.

He turned and looked round. But there was only the old tortoise with his back to them and the quiet garden tranced in sunlight.

"What is it, my love?"

She shook her head sadly and her tears began to fall. "Our plans, they are but childish. It cannot be . . ."

"It can be and it shall!" he reassured her.

"But—I had not thought . . . They will not let me over la frontera. I have never left Spain before. I have no pasaporte."

That was true enough. Yet it seemed she had all the answers, for while he was plunged in thought, she brightened as swiftly as

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she had grown despondent, wiping her tears with her handkerchief before he had time to kiss them away, and saying, " I know the brother of a friend of mine who works in the office of the pasaporte in the next town from here. He would help me. He is young and he too loved a girl he was forbidden to marry. I shall go to him tomorrow pretending it is for a shopping expedition, so old Pedro will never guess. I shall tell my friend that you and I are running away to be married by a priest and that then we shall cross into France. He will get me a pasaporte on yours—as your wife."

He did not understand at first, and she explained very patiently. It struck him that for an untravelled girl, she knew far more than he did about passports and frontier crossings. But she explained even that, laughing and telling him how a cousin of hers had eloped—with an *Americano*—and crossed the frontier on her husband's passport.

" Can't I see your friend at the passport office and save you the trouble? " he offered.

She said that that would be no good, as his Spanish was not fluent enough, and she would be able to get favours from her friend, which he would not be able to do. " In two days I shall be on your pasaporte, as your wife—you will see! " she promised.

He went back to his pension and brought her his passport. " Take care of it, whatever you do," he cautioned.

" Come for me in two days' time—at the hour I said—and I shall join you at the door in the wall. My friend will, I am sure, have made all the arrangements by then." She stood on tiptoe quite suddenly and kissed his forehead. " *Adiós, querido mio*, and good luck to your picture! "

Except for a few touches which he could add from memory, his picture was finished. It would accompany them to England on their honeymoon. In the two days that remained he would cable his Paris bank for more money and overhaul his ancient car so that he could rely on it to get them to la frontera!

He left her almost happily, eager for the two days to pass. He was as excited as a schoolboy and would have tipped the old tortoise generously, except that he thought it might not be a good policy, and he felt sure the old man would have refused it, for he eyed him sourly when he left.

All his life he would remember that vigil through the long warm hours of a Spanish night, by the door in the wall through which no Señorita ever came. The scents from the garden, drifting over the wall, were languorous and heavy, the mosaic courtyard emptied of its pigeons, and the fountain turned off for

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the night. Far below, the sea whispered and moved in its endless activity, with here and there the light from a lone fishing-boat, and a twinkle from the sleeping town. But the house gave not a flicker of light or movement, its windows like so many blind eyes.

The smallest rustle made him alert, expecting—then as the hours dragged by, hoping for—the swish of a skirt, the clink of a bracelet, the light footfall of a woman. The darkness yielded none of these, and the faint pearly dawn, rising like Aphrodite out of the sea, found him heavy-eyed and hopeless, sitting in the dust by the roadside.

His feelings were mixed. Something must have gone wrong. Or—the serpent of doubt whispered—had he been fooled? Bereft of his passport and of something he believed he would never find again.

Cursing fate, or his folly, he returned to the pension when the sun was high, and said that, as his plans were changed, he would like to stay a little longer. The motherly woman asked no questions but gave him a breakfast of coffee and eggs and fruit.

He took a long swim in the sea and then, refreshed, went back to the house. This time he walked in, determined to find her. The familiar sight of pigeons and playing fountain greeted him; but he nearly jumped when he saw the old tortoise bowed among his flower-beds; for so strong was doubt in him now that he had not expected to see the old man again.

He went up to him and asked for the Señorita, and his question brought the same hand-cupped-to-ear response. Tired and exasperated, he shouted, "The Señorita—where is she? I must see her and you must tell me where she is!"

The old man stood upright, and without his stoop and his shambling gait, he was over six foot tall. Muscles bulged on his great arms; the hand gripping a spade was a powerful one.

Strange how, under the spell of the garden and the Señorita, he had never noticed what a strong and handsome old man this was! His eyes, pale hazel in colour, flashed scorn. The transformation was staggering. How had he ever regarded this man as a fumbling menial? His rugged features were stamped with arrogance.

They faced each other, their eyes on a level, and where a smaller man might have quailed, the artist stood his ground. He feared for his Señorita. Had she been taken away by force?

"Where is the Señorita?" he asked, in a voice high with rage.

The old man answered in staccato English, each word a flick of scorn, and it was at that moment, hearing the atrocious accent, discovering that he could speak English at all, that the artist knew he had been duped

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" The Señora," said the old man, " go with her husband, my son. They go out of Spain. My son have no pasaporte—he cannot get one. So his wife, the Señora, she give to him your pasaporte, and his English good—not like mine—he grow hairs on chin like yours, and dress to look like you. By this time they safely away. But your pasaporte will be delivered back to you—one day, two days, at the pension."

He held back the expletives that would have burst from him. With dignity he asked, " How do I know you are not lying? "

" Ask in the town who lives here—ask about my son."

" And the police—? I suppose you have never thought that I might go to them and—and tell them how I have been tricked out of my passport? "

The old man's voice softened. " No man likes to be laughed at, señor, more especially the English who like to think their hearts are cold towards women. If your pasaporte he is not returned, then it is time to think of the police. But I, Pedro Gonzallo, pledge my honour he will be returned. News travels and all Spain would laugh at the Englishman who is a well-known artista. Spanish laughter is loud. So police—I say no, not yet! not till your pasaporte he is not returned. But he will be . . .

It was, in a registered package from Lyons, a few days later. Inside, it bore the exit stamp of a Spanish frontier town.

Before he left, hurriedly, in his ancient car, taking his picture with him, and roaring away as though all the devils of Spain were chasing him, or laughing at him, he questioned the woman at his pension about the occupants of the house he described.

The son, she told him, was *malo*. He was a brigand and had been on the run for a few years. Often the house had been searched but he was never found. His wife lived there with the father, and sometimes she went to France and sometimes to Sicily where they said her husband was in hiding.

She was *bella*, but a wildcat herself, and after a shooting affray had served a term in prison for helping her husband with contraband goods. The father had been rich and well educated, but now he spent all his time in his garden, and avoided answering questions by pretending to be deaf. In his youth, he too had been wild. The Señor should see their garden before he left. See it properly from the inside, for the old father was become a great gardener and it was a very beautiful Spanish garden.

★ ★ ★

## *SOLE SUPPORTING EVIDENCE*

***When you can tread on nine daises at once, spring has come.***

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# About Mabel Grote

**He expected the most original results —and by and large he got them**

by JOHN INGLIS HALL

THERE was something awesome about the coming of Mabel Grote; awesome, yet familiar and friendly. We knew at once that she was one of us.

I heard the crunch of gravel under the wheels of the taxi that brought her from the station to my mother's house in Herefordshire, and looked down from my bedroom window to see a very tall, stately woman, dressed in black, step down and glide magnificently round to the boot of the car to supervise the unloading of her luggage. She stood beside the driver, directing him too minutely in this rather simple task, occasionally pointing out to him, with a thin, spare, tasselled black umbrella, something which he instantly made clear to her by signs that he knew already.

When she had given her orders, she picked up one package herself, and with majestic calm, like a ship under sail, moved over to the porch, and rang the bell. I noticed with some fascination that the package she had chosen to carry consisted of a number of fishing-rods in brown cotton cases, tied together with string.

According to her courteous practice, my mother met Mabel Grote in the hall. Eavesdropping intentionally, I listened to their meeting from round a bend in the staircase. Mabel Grote took the initiative as they shook hands.

"How do you do, madam," she said in a melodious, deferential voice, every word perfectly articulated. "Please call me Grote. Lady Catterly called me Grote, Mrs. St. Barbe Johnstone called me Grote, and so did the Maharaja. I have always been called Grote. I prefer it."

Mabel Grote had been obtained by my mother as head housemaid from Mrs. Soames's Agency in Bristol.

My mother said, "Good, then Grote it shall be."

She told me afterwards how Grote had overawed her in those first few minutes; how tongue-tied she had felt; and how, momentarily, the fishing-rods had saved her. I entered the hall just as they had begun to talk about them.

"I see that you fish, Grote," she said, pointing to the package

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of rods lying on the oak refectory table in the centre of the hall.

Grote nodded and smiled. "Yes indeed, madam," she said. "On my days off, I always like to fish in season, if I can. A most pleasant sport. I never married you know."

My mother choked back a laugh. Later, we discovered that Grote's unexpected juxtapositions of ideas were all intentional.

"My husband has part of the Wye, on both banks," my mother said. "It runs through the grounds."

Grote put her head on one side and raised a deprecating hand. "I would not presume to fish an expensive river like the Wye, madam, but there may well be tributaries which your husband might have someone point out to me," she said. In an unsmiling face, her grey eyes twinkled.

The idea of Grote, in a sou'wester and mackintosh, casting a fly was instantly dear to me. I was delighted with her, and I could see that my mother was, too. By the time my mother had showed her to her room, she had learnt that Grote was also an expert on early church architecture, and collected butterflies. Grote, in fact, made an immediate and powerful impression on us all. The impression was evidently just as great below-stairs.

From her first afternoon—on the very day of her arrival—everything in the house worked more perfectly than it had ever done before. For tea there were dishes of wafer-thin brown-bread-and-butter sandwiches of six entirely different and infinitely delicate flavours; toasted and buttered teacakes, crisp and very hot. The huge silver teapot, milk-jug, and matching tray, with a wedding inscription to my grandmother from two legendary personages called Graf und Gräfin Botho zu Erbenbach-Patzweiler, were burnished as I had never seen them burnished in my life before.

Grote served the tea herself, spruce and dignified, in a starched cap and an absurdly small apron which lay like a white, frilly atoll on the surface of the black ocean of her midriff. After tea, she asked my mother for another audience—she loved formalities of all kinds—at which I was present. My mother opened the proceedings with a few words of praise of the sandwiches.

"Lady Catterly's Monsieur Krebs—his own specialities, madam," Grote said, obviously gratified. "And I have fifty other fillings, all as good as the ones you have had today."

"How very nice," said my mother, smiling. There was little else to say.

"Madam, I have a request to make," said Grote. "I shall be in charge at the serving of meals, naturally; but you will forgive me if I leave the room quickly when anything really funny is said? I can't control my laugh, madam. In all the years I've

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been in service—and it's thirty-five this year—I've never been able to. And my laugh is terribly loud. I fairly yell. I was once too shy to tell my mistresses about it, and sometimes I got into trouble. Now that I'm getting older, I'm a little more sensible."

I looked up at Grote's smooth, kind old face, with respect and affection. It was an altogether charming admission.

My mother laughed. "Why, of course," she said. "You do just what helps the meal along, Grote. You mean to say that it is really so loud that it stops everything? I can't believe it."

Grote nodded. "Everything, madam," she said. "You see nobody expects it. Sometimes I even lose control of the dishes I'm handling. Once I poured some sole Mornay down the Bishop of Hawley. How I laughed!"

"That must have been quite wonderful for you," said my mother, beginning to grasp the rules of the game and how to play it. "But tell me, does this thing strike you often?"

"Oh no, madam," said Grote. "The gentry aren't really as funny as all that. But sometimes people come out quickly with something very good, you know, and I forget myself."

"What a splendid person," I said when she had left the room.

My mother laughed delightedly. "If she weren't so huge and soft, your father would certainly fall in love with her," she said. "He may even now."

Dinner the following evening added immensely to Grote's reputation. There were six guests, including the Lord Lieutenant of the County, and several other local grandees. Grote insisted on going down to the wine-cellar with my father when he was choosing the wines for the dinner. I met them in the hall on the way back to the dining-room, and knew at once that they had been discussing wine with pleasure and high seriousness. Grote was carrying the bottles preciously in a big wicker basket.

"A real joy to see such a splendid cellar, sir," she was saying, rather out of breath after walking up the steep stairs. "I'll decant the claret right away, and put it on the mantelpiece to take the room temperature. I'm sure you usually do it yourself, sir, but I'm used to it, and if you stay to see me do it this time, you'll feel happier about it in the future. Though if you are a gentleman who likes to handle his own wines from start to finish, I'm not one to interfere, of course."

My father looked on critically as she decanted the wine with a perfectly steady hand, in front of the still, yellow flame of a candle, until the first grains of the deposit passed, and she put the bottle down, smiling. I could see that my father was quite bewitched by her.

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"And the moselle not too cold, Grote," he said.

"Certainly not. Chilled, sir, just chilled," said Grote. "You may rely on me, sir."

Her serving of dinner was a triumph. She wore a black silk dress under her spotless white apron. It crinkled and rustled and creaked as she walked; and she smelt faintly of lavender. A heavy, gold-rimmed Victorian cameo sat at her throat like a scarab.

She served her dishes with neatness, speed, and a sort of smooth-sailing rhythmic dignity, like a person of riper years on roller skates. It was evident that she thought well of the cooking, and looked as though she expected our guests to take pleasure in it, too. The wine she treated with infinite respect. I can still remember her gentle, precise turn of the bottle-neck when pouring, and the small dry shake by means of which she detached the hanging drop which would otherwise have soiled the spotless tablecloth.

The table she had set with a beautiful precision, each place matching to the inch, opposites lined up with opposites. The napkins were folded, starched, and ironed into elaborate white windmills, with a single small red polyanthus rose at the hub of the sails. There was a flower decoration at the centre of the table, in sober, elegant good taste.

When my mother went in to look at the table before dinner, Grote appeared behind her, like a substantial galleon in full sail. My mother found absolutely no comment to make except: "How beautiful, Grote!"

Her performance was sufficient to enslave my father completely. He was a man to whom convention was anathema, but who loved order, and he felt instantly that Grote represented order and complete unconventionality to the highest degree: a perfect balance.

From that day on, therefore, he gave in to every suggestion she made, and expected from her the most original results—and, by and large, he got them.

For example, when he heard of Grote's fishing-rods, he called her to his study the evening before her first day off, and questioned her closely about salmon fishing. Her replies satisfied him that she might be a good performer, so he gave her permission to fish one of his beats of the Wye on her days off all through the season.

When, on her first day out, Grote caught a grilse of seven pounds and had it served personally to him and his guests the following day for lunch, my father's joy was extreme. Later he became used to dining out in London on Grote's angling

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triumphs: she was just as skilled with the dry fly for trout as she was with the wet for salmon.

Only one serious crisis ever arose in our affairs with Grote. It came about in this way. Once a year, my father and mother gave a grand cocktail party, to which the whole neighbourhood was invited. It took place about a month after Grote's arrival, and she began to organize it in every detail, beforehand. She was given complete charge of it; everyone worked under her, from the permanent house staff to the extras from the village.

All through the afternoon of the day itself, her canapés piled up on every available side table, on my mother's finest service of silver dishes. Grote was a monarch, a queen of canapés. She glided about among them, impeccable, energetic, tidy, artistic. By four, the flowers were done, ready for my mother to give the vases the final touches. By half past, Grote, slightly pink in the face from her sustained effort, was hard at work mixing the drinks, for the guests were due to start arriving at about six o'clock.

At five-fifteen, a horrified under-housemaid called Doris sought out my mother in her room. The girl was pale. "Oh madam," she said, "Miss Grote is unwell, I think. You'd better, please, come down."

I was with her, and we went downstairs together. We found Grote lying very neatly and exactly in the middle of a blue Aubusson carpet—in the centre, as though she were a part of the pattern—perfectly tidy, and beatifically smiling. Her eyes were half closed and she was singing, on the whole tunefully, an extremely coarse version of *Phil the Fluter's Ball.*

"Grote!" exclaimed my mother, "what in heaven's name are you doing?"

Grote stopped singing.

"Lying down, cosy and snug, but damned hot, madam, like a little chippolata sausage in the pan," she said sweetly, then gave a decorous whoop, followed by a wild yell of laughter, evidently the dinner-table kind. My mother quickly dismissed Doris, and asked me to call my father.

"I won't sack her, even if she's as drunk as a lord," I heard my father mutter as he walked with me from his study.

When we entered the drawing-room, Grote sat up, pulled herself onto a chair, and burst into one of the more belligerent verses of *Rule, Britannia.* Then she called for three cheers for my father, and gave them alone, with a noble lack of affectation.

My father said, "Now Grote, my dear woman, you are drunk, quite drunk. Come along with me, and my wife will put you to bed."

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" Drunk," said Grote thickly. " I should say I am drunk, sir. I am indeed. Swimming in drink, like a little chippolata sausage on a match-stick, floating down a damned great river. That's me, sir. So now I want to lie down. All that beautiful drink! I had some of everything—and I never drink much—except sometimes. Pity, because I didn't want to leave this house, and you especially, sir, until they carry me out feet first . . ."

Suddenly she fell asleep. We caught her as she slipped from the chair to the floor; my father and I carried her up to bed.

Next morning when she asked to see my mother, she was in her going-away clothes, and her bags were packed and ready in the servants' hall. It was at this interview that Grote really showed her class. My mother told me about it afterwards.

First, she asked her to sit down.

" Thank you, madam," said Grote firmly. " But I would not wish to be lacking in respect to you for the second time in twenty-four hours. If I were a young girl, I might make excuses, but I'm not, and I won't. Sometimes, I feel unhappy and very lonely, and at those times I like to get drunk, madam. Generally, I make an excuse and go away and get it over alone. It's an awful thing, madam. Like a sort of earthquake, growling about in one's mind, and in one's stomach. Whenever I do it in somebody else's home, I'm usually sacked, and this is one of those times. I'm sorry, madam; particularly as I had hoped to stay here. You are such a funny household, and I like you all so much."

She was admirably simple and affecting. My mother said, " Oh, but, Grote, we wouldn't dream of dismissing you. We simply couldn't. My husband wouldn't hear of it. He'd just say, ' We all of us get drunk sometimes,' and that would be all."

" That's very kind of him, madam, but is it wise? How do you know I don't do this every month, getting worse each time? You ought to think of your own interests."

" But you don't do it often, do you, Grote? "

" True enough, madam. Three or four times a year at the most. It's not pleasant, I know, but it's human. Why shouldn't I have faults, like anyone else? "

" Why not indeed? " said my mother.

By the evening, she was unpacked again and restored to her functions. She never spoke of leaving us again. Grote's rare—but sometimes monumental—benders passed into family history. They were accepted like the seasons. She did not leave the house, except for her fishing-trips and rare shopping expeditions, until two weeks before her death, which took place four years later.

As usual on great occasions—and leaving the house was such an occasion—she came to see my mother for a solemn audience.

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" Madam," she said, " are you at all superstitious? "

" Well no, Grote," my mother said. " Or rather, we all are to some extent. Why? "

" I have had the feeling for days now that I must go back to Leominster, where I was born, see our old house again, and buy myself a plot to be buried in. If it's not inconvenient, madam, I'd like a fortnight. It may be urgent."

My mother accorded it immediately. Next, Grote went to my father and asked for the name of his lawyers. " You see, sir," she said, " I want to draw up a will. I've no close relations, and I want to leave my money in just my own way."

My father gave her the name of his lawyers and a letter to the senior partner. She thanked him warmly.

" The thing is, sir," she said very quietly, " I didn't want to shock dear madam, but in a few weeks I'll be dead. I can feel it in me, like a weight. And I want to go home."

Instantly, my father offered her his own doctor in London, specialists—anything she wanted. Grote refused. " Waste of money, sir. It's my heart. The thing is quite worn out. My doctor told me so last year, and now I know it's true. You are very good to me, sir, all the same. And I never enjoyed anything in my life as much as these last four years—never, sir."

Grote died at Leominster, just one week after this conversation with my father.

Her will was one of the most charming documents I ever heard read. She left all her possessions to my mother, and her savings jointly to my father and mother, in trust, for them to give away, as they thought best, to people in real need or trouble, to whom a hundred pounds might be salvation.

*I'd like it not to be given away in penny numbers*, she wrote in her letter of instruction, *but in good round sums which mean something.* She added: *I don't want it spent on goody-goody people either—just on folk of any kind, good or bad, who happen to be in a mess. There are always plenty of them about.*

My mother and father administered her little fortune with generosity, care, and a quiet humour that Grote herself would have appreciated. They never gave twice for the same reason, but then unreason was my father's speciality. He and my mother were, between them, the perfect people to handle Grote's trust in the way she would have wished.

★ ★ ★

*NAVEL OCCASION*

*Hula-hula: a wild waist show.*

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# Perfumes of Arabia

**And French perfume that rocks the room**
*Buttons and Bows*

*Bearing white myrrh and incense, autumn melts*
*Through flower and fruit and combed blonde straw;*
*Thunder looms on the mountain forest-belt;*
*The winter firewood purrs beneath the saw.*

*Our garden scents upbillow like the veils*
*Of Solomon's temple, shimmer in the rain,*
*And all is peace. Slowly the daylight fails,*
*And voice and lute bring back the stars again.*

CHARLES SPEAR, *From a Book of Hours*

## *Attar of Roses*

For several days he has been bringing me roses, bidding me take care of them and not to let them fade. Yesterday he arrived with a huge sheaf of fresh ones.

"But, Charles," I said, "I have no more vases. What shall I do with them?"

"No vases are needed," he replied; and putting the flowers on the floor, sat down on a stool.

Then he began to pick up the roses one by one, reciting, as he did so, these lovely words in a chanting voice like that of a magician weaving spells.

"Sweet is the scent of this our room.

"A scarlet rose, for pride and joy in love.

"A crimson rose, for the delights and triumphs of a sultry night.

"A white rose for tenderness, for kisses and for sweet anticipation.

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"A pink rose, for the grace and movement of a fair young body.

"A rose shading from pink to yellow, for gentle caresses, for the light touch of lips on flesh.

"A yellow rose for fierce embrace and for the glory of a wild surrender."

All the time he was cutting off the stalks, stripping the leaves, carefully removing every thorn. Gradually the couch was strewn with rose-heads—a litter of sweet-smelling loveliness.

"What *are* you doing?" I cried . . .

He nodded and smiled, but said nothing. Then he got up and began to undress me. When I was quite naked, he carried me to the bed and laid me down. Kissing me all over, he said, half to himself: "Roses—and petals of roses . . ."

Then he began to gather up the rose-heads and strew them over the bed and over my body. Finally he took me in his arms and loved me through the curtain of the roses. The soft petals lay sweetly against me, and the perfume of the flowers blended with the sweetness of love.

JEANNE AURELIE GRIVOLIN, *Breviary of Love*

## *Chanel*

*Scent like a river-pilot led me there:*
*Bedroom darkness spreading like moss,*
*The polished wells of floors in blackness*
*Gave no reflections of the personage,*
*Or the half-open door, but whispered on:*

*"Skin be supple, hair be smooth,*
*Lips and character attend*
*In mnemonic solitude.*
*Kisses leave no fingerprints."*

*"Answer." But no answer came.*
*"Beauty hunted leaves no clues."*

*Yet as if rising from a still,*
*Perfume whispered at the sill,*
*All those discarded husks of thought*
*Hanging untenanted like gowns,*
*Rinds of which the fruit had gone . . .*

*Still the long chapter led me on.*
*Still the clock beside the bed*
*Heart-beat after heart-beat shed.*

LAWRENCE DURRELL

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## *On the Scent*

Aunt Violet was one of the beautiful Vivian twins, both of whom were maids of honour to Queen Victoria. She was later also lady in waiting to Queen Alexandra, and then to Princess Victoria. With her air of languishing elegance, she looked like a drooping flower, and her bedroom smelt faintly of some exotic perfume. On her pin-cushion was a bunch of false curls which intrigued me every time I saw them. I repeatedly asked her what they were, and invariably got the same answer: "My pug dog's tail." Prince Dimitri of Russia has since told me that when he was a small boy at Sandringham, and Aunt Violet was in waiting to Queen Alexandra, who was his aunt, he and the other children were able to track her from room to room, by sniffing the chairs on which she had sat and so left the smell of her scent.

DAPHNE FIELDING, *Mercury Presides*

## *Exotic Perfume*

*When I, with eyes shut, on warm autumn eves,*
*The fragrance of your warmer breast respire,*
*I see a country bathed in solar fire*
*Whose happy shores its lustre never leaves;*
*An isle of indolence, where nature raises*
*Singular trees and fruits both sweet and tender,*
*Where men have bodies vigorous and slender*
*And women's eyes a candour that amazes.*
*Led by your scent to fairer climes at last,*
*I see a port of sails, where every mast*
*Seems weary of the labours of its cruise;*
*While scents of tamarind, blown here and there,*
*Swelling my nostrils as they rinse the air,*
*Are mingled with the chanties of the crews.*

CHARLES BAUDELAIRE, *translated by Roy Campbell*

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# *Dead Reckoning*

**The pay-off had been sharp and sudden**

by MICHAEL GILBERT

THE key to Gunner David Land's character is simplicity. He was simple and direct in a way which is commonly supposed to be confined to children. Also he was a Lowland Scot.

Davie got on to the Barchester bus at Parksbury, climbed to the upper deck, and secured the very front seat. The neat, worn, often-pressed battle-dress and spotless brass and webbing waist-belt proclaimed him an old soldier. The brass titles said Royal Horse Artillery—not horses now, of course, but thundering petrol- and diesel-driven monsters.

The face said nothing. It was brown with outstaring summer and winter on Luneburg Heath and Salisbury Plain. It was expressionless because his years in the ranks had taught him that a vaguely alert lack of expression was the best face to hand out to the world.

The bus was filling up with soldiers, for Parksbury is the home station and training-ground of all Gunners on the Plain and the Cathedral City of Barchester is where they spend their pay.

The conductor, when he sold him his ticket, did not spare Davie a second look. Nobody gave him a second look.

There was absolutely nothing to indicate that he was a traitor, engaged in trafficking his country's secrets to the enemy.

It had started with Badger Lees. Davie and Badger had joined the army on the same day in 1945, just in time to see the Wehrmacht go up in flames. Together they had signed on afterwards. They liked the life, they liked their jobs. Davie was a mechanic, Badger a wireless expert. They liked each other. Together they had outwitted simple young officers, and outfaced a dynasty of Sergeants-Major. Neither fate nor the War Office could prize them apart. They were inseparable.

And then, shortly after coming to Parksbury, in the simplest and most deadly way possible, it had happened.

Badger got money. Not in one glorious bang, by the death of an aunt or the winning of a football pool, but insidiously, gradually, inexplicably

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At first it was a joke. On the day before pay-day, that lean period when the Canteen is empty and single cigarettes are at a premium, Badger had pulled a pound note—a whole Jimmy O'Goblin—out of his pocket and had stood them both a slap-up meal of eggs and bangers.

"Been robbing a till?" said Davie.

"That's right," said Badger.

Then it hadn't been so funny.

Badger had bought a motor bike. Not an army job; a real private, civvy motor bike, which he kept in a lock-up garage outside the Camp. He'd taken Davie out on it, too. But the plump carrier seat was designed for softer freight, and it wasn't long before Davie, standing outside the NAAFI, had watched his friend roar by with a bundle of something blonde and clinging which he had recognized, with dismay, as the daughter of the Officers' Mess Steward, a predatory young lady who had never before been seen out with anything humbler than a Quarter-master Sergeant.

Davie shut his eyes. He didn't like to think much about that period. There had been worse to come, of course. Much worse. But then it had been sharp and sudden. It was the gradual breaking-off that had really hurt.

The bus had ground its way up the highest point now. The golf course stretched away on the right. A quartet was forming up on the first green, two worried-looking men with stomachs and two over-coloured women. Davie hardly saw them. They lived outside his hard, male world.

The pay-off had come—how long ago?—almost a year ago. It had come with the arrival of a smooth-looking Sergeant of S.I.B. who had asked a great many questions, and had seemed particularly interested in Badger and his motor bicycle.

And then, that Saturday evening, when Davie had been sitting on his bed wondering how to fill in the time, and Badger had come in and said, "Let's go up to the hut, Davie." No need to ask which hut. It was an old lecture hut, of which they knew the trick of the door, a quiet place for smokes and gossips, when Sergeants were looking for fatigues and only very green ducks hung around quarters.

In the half dark Badger had told him everything.

It started, he said, almost by accident.

Did Davie remember that café they sometimes went to in Barchester? They used to call it the Ark, because the old man who kept it had a beard and a son called Ham.

Badger had gone in, one night, alone, and had got talking to

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Ham, a big red-faced lout who dressed smartly and knew a lot of answers. They'd talked about money. "You soldiers don't know money when you see it," said Ham. "What's your job? Wireless, isn't it? Know those new two-way valves?"

Badger said certainly he knew them. He took them in and out almost every day. If he hadn't been a bit lit he might have wondered how Ham knew so much about them.

"Did you know," asked Ham, "that you could get a fiver each for them?" And he told him where. A man who kept a garage on the London road, name of Bird. Badger knew the garage. The thought stayed with him.

About a week later he left camp with a new valve in his pocket and called at the garage.

The owner was in; a fat, jolly, greasy creature, who seemed to be expecting him. He hardly looked at the valve. He paid over five new one-pound notes and said that he was interested in variometers too. They worked out at eight to twelve pounds according to condition. A fortnight later Badger laid his hands on a variometer. It must have been in the very pink of condition because he got twelve pounds for it.

And so it went on. It wasn't always so easy. In the end even the Army, the great, prodigal, uncaring Army, began to get worried about the steady drain on its wireless stores. But Badger was skilful, and lucky.

It had gone on for nearly nine months. Then the trap shut, so smoothly and so quietly that he had hardly seen the springs move.

It was one evening at the café. He had been promoted now to the intimacy of the private room upstairs. That night another man had been there with Ham. A man who looked like a genial ape and whose name, it seemed, was Laddy.

Laddy said little, but what he did say was to the point. "There's a gadget," he said. "It's just been fitted to your service radar sets. It's called the No. 1 Attachment."

Badger said he knew it, but had no idea how it worked.

"Don't worry about how it works," said Laddy. "Just get it as it stands. There's a hundred pounds in it for you."

Badger had seen the red light then. This wasn't valves and transformers. This was the real thing. He was telling the truth when he said he knew little about it, but he couldn't help guessing, from the precautions that surrounded it, that it was pretty near top secret.

He argued first. Then blustered. It was like kicking a brick wall.

When he'd run himself down, Laddy had said: "You've got a month. At the end of that time the Army hears all about you."

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"You'd be in for it as much as me if you did that," said Badger.

"How so?" said Ham innocently. "Have you been selling stolen goods to *us*? Can you prove any connection between us and Bird? Just you start to try. You might be able to get Bird into trouble, but he's used to that. He's well paid for it. It won't mean much to him."

Badger saw the point. He said he'd think it over.

"We're not going to talk about it again," said Laddy coldly. "And don't come here again, either. When you get it, phone up and arrange a meeting-place outside."

That had been six weeks ago, said Badger. He hadn't done anything. Chiefly because he hadn't been able to. The box had been too well guarded. Also because, somehow or other, he drew the line between scrounging and—the other thing.

Neither of them said the word, but it stood there, in the dusty darkness of the hut, like a presence: cold, with the cold of the axe-edge and the grease of the gibbet.

"What will you do?" said Davie at last.

"I haven't decided," said Badger. "I know what I want after all that talk, and that's a pint of wallop." And he had squeezed Davie's arm, just like in the old days, and they had walked to the inn on the London road and drunk themselves into a state where nothing mattered; and that night, or very early next morning, Badger had walked away from the Camp, a long way out onto the Plain, and had shot the top of his head off with a service rifle.

Davie had done nothing and said nothing. But a month or two later, when some of the skirl had died away, he had gone to Barchester and visited the café.

It surprised him, whenever he thought of it, how exactly everything had been repeated. It was like a film seen twice. The same carefully casual opening. The same offer. Even the same prices. Thirty pieces of silver, no more, no less.

Any differences that existed were at Davie's end. He bought no motor cycle. He directed no attention to the Mess Steward's daughter. All the money he received he had rolled up and put in a cocoa tin, which he buried, by night, on the Plain. At the end of the fourth month he added a second tin.

He had even been able to forecast just when and how the screw would be put on. First it was an influx of civilians from the Experimental Station. He had noted the precautions which surrounded the gadgets they brought with them. No one had precisely explained it to him, but Davie was an engineer, by

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birth and by training, and he had the engineer's extra sense which told him how things worked. After that it was no surprise when the special ammunition was issued, a propellant and a fuse so novel that only one set of Range Tables existed for them, and that one was written out by hand.

The bus swung up over the second big rise—hardly a hill, a heaving-up of one shoulder of the Plain. From the top you could see, for the first time, the spire of Barchester Cathedral. It was to see it, just in that way, that Davie took the front seat.

He had put up more of a fight than Badger. They had had to get quite rough with him before he had knuckled under. Of course they had beaten him in the end. That was inevitable. And now he was on his way to them with tokens of final submission.

The bus slowed at the first traffic lights and Davie jumped off. There was a military policeman at the bus station and there was something in Davie's pocket that made it silly to take unnecessary risks.

The café lay behind the market. It was a hard, cheap, desperate place, little used by day, barely tolerable after ten o'clock at night when the public houses were shut and it offered another two hours of sanctuary and warmth and badly cooked, rather expensive food.

The downstairs room was empty, except for the girl behind the counter, whose face was as white and crumpled and as dirty as the dish cloth in her hand.

" Ham's upstairs," she said.

Davie thanked her politely and went up. At the door of the private room he took off his hat. They were both there, Laddy sitting behind the table, Ham lounging his great length in a chair under the window.

" Come in," said Ham. " No need to stand about. This isn't defaulters. Take a chair. No hard feelings."

Davie sat down.

" I hear you got something for us," said Laddy. He smiled. When he smiled he made his face look worse.

" I've got a sketch," said Davie. " It's a simplified working-plan. I made it from memory. After one of the instructors let me look at the blueprints. I think it's about right, though it's not to scale or anything. But that wasn't what I really wanted to tell you. I think I might be able to get hold of the thing itself."

Neither man stirred. And when Ham spoke, his voice sounded the same, or very nearly so.

" How could you do that? " he said.

" They used to take it back to Paulton," said Davie. " Every

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time. It never stayed in Camp. But lately they've given that up. It was too much trouble, I suppose. Now it stays in the Camp Q Store. But as a matter of fact—" Davie examined his square blackened nails apologetically—" I can get in. We—" he nearly said, " Badger and me," but switched at the last moment —" a friend and me used to do it. We did it for fun, really."

" They'd spot it was missing at once," said Ham, but he said it thoughtfully. " There'd be such a flapdoodle no one would be able to move hand or foot."

" Yes," said Davie. " And that's why I'd have to do it on a Sunday. No one ever goes near the store on Sunday. I would get it out on Saturday night, and hide it somewhere outside, in the open. If you could get up on Sunday morning—"

" Then you'd put it back on Sunday night."

" That's right," said Davie. " There's lots of ways up onto the Ranges if you know them. You don't need to go past a picket."

" You're telling me," said Ham. He lounged to his feet, went over to a cupboard, unlocked it, and took out a map. " I was born and suckled in Bunty's Folly. I know every blade of grass on those sodding Ranges. Let's think. A little pint-pot like you won't get very far from Camp, carrying the whole outfit. It must weigh most of a hundredweight."

" Here's where I thought," said Davie. He put his finger on a saucepan-shaped wood. " You can find it easy. There's a path runs up the left-hand side. It's not exactly a motor road."

" We've got an old jeep," said Ham. " It'll go anywhere the army can get."

" If you park it—" Davie picked up a pencil and marked a spot carefully inside the top left-hand angle of the handle of the pan—" just there. There's a little place you can back in and keep out of sight. I'll have it nearby. I can't say exactly where."

" Ten o'clock sharp," said Ham.

" You'll not be seen? "

" You do your own worrying," said Ham.

" And you'll bring the money with you? "

" You'll get the money all right."

" But you'll bring it with you? "

" All right," said Ham. " We'll bring it with us. Stop worrying."

Davie went downstairs, said good afternoon politely to the girl, and walked out into the street.

As he walked he thought about the two men. He had once watched the man called Ham in action. A drunken soldier had started to make a disturbance in the café. Ham had hit him.

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He had held him against the counter with one hand and hit him in the face with the other until his face was a mess.

Davie walked slowly, but steadily. He had an appointment with a great man. Unlike most great men, this one had no particular objection to being kept waiting. Five minutes or five days, it signified nothing to him. He had been standing for five hundred years in a niche outside the west front of the Cathedral.

More than two years before, on a hot summer's afternoon, he and Badger had been in the Cathedral Close, lying on their backs on the grass, waiting for the pubs to open. They had found themselves listening to a white-bearded clergyman who was lecturing a party of students. It was the sound of his own name that had caught Davie's attention. So he had strolled across to look, and the stone figure had taken his fancy at the very first sight.

He had said nothing to Badger, who would have laughed at him. Nevertheless, if he found himself with ten minutes to spare in his visits to Barchester he had got into the habit of sauntering, as if by accident, to the same spot and staring for a few moments at his namesake.

This time he went straight there; under the arch, across the cobbles, and over the smooth precinct lawn. The old stone man was waiting for him.

He was not quite like the others, kings, apostles and martyrs. A freak of time and weather had bitten into this one face a character all its own. Davie knew a little about him. He had been a shepherd boy, and then he had been a king. He had killed a giant, he had got the best of all his enemies; he had lost his best friend, and he had died in sorrow. All that could be read in his stern and beautiful face.

Davie stood for a long time staring up at the stone man above him. And when he turned away it was as if he was saying good-bye.

"Ten o'clock," Ham said to Laddy. "I hope our little friend is punctual."

It was a lovely Sunday morning. The two men sat in their small car. They had tucked it neatly into the extreme tip of Saucepan Wood. In front of them the Plain fell away, and without shifting in their seats they could see, through the thin screen of trees in front of them, a long stretch of valley, which dipped, then rose to the next wood.

At that moment Laddy gave a grunt. "I didn't know they made them work on Sundays," he said.

Ham looked up from the map he was studying.

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Over the far crest had appeared a line of four self-propelled guns; squat and boxlike in shape, with none of the grace of a tank, and yet they moved over the ground with a curious, riding ease. Only, when they crossed a bare patch, a mare's tail of sand flung suddenly out behind each of them was a reminder of their soft-moving weight and power.

Ham picked up his field-glasses and studied them carefully. "That's our little friend's regiment," he said at last. "If the powers that be have suddenly decreed a Sunday exercise we may have to wait all day for him."

"Worth it," said Laddy. "Look out, they're coming this way."

"So what?" said Ham. "They can't shoot us just for being here."

The four guns dipped, like battle cruisers in line astern. They were following one of the many tracks scratched on the turf. Now they were near enough for the men in the car to distinguish figures. A very young officer was standing in the leading gun. He was frowning over the map, but the sight of Saucepan Wood seemed to reassure him for he gave a signal and the line veered slightly and came towards the tip of the wood.

"They're coming here," said Laddy.

"For goodness sake!" said Ham. "So what?"

As the guns approached, the noise of them swelled until they seemed to fill the wood with their deep roaring.

The leader reached the corner and turned; not like a car, in a running circle, but checking and pivoting on its belly as a tank turns. Then, straightening onto its new course, it followed the path down the side of the wood. It passed not six foot from where the two men sat. One of the gun-crew looked up and grinned. The officer was busy with his map again. A fine dust whipped suddenly across their windscreen. Then the monster was gone. The second and third guns followed precisely, twisting on the exact spot, like a well-drilled chorus.

The fourth gun varied a little from this routine. It checked a yard or two short of the turning-place, pivoted, and sliced through the corner of the wood. There was a rending crash as two small trees splayed out before it, a bush was caught in the track and tossed into the air. Then the great steel bow hit the car full and fair: it hardly checked: it rose a little, and passed on.

"They had absolutely no *right* to be there," said the Troop Commander for the fiftieth time. "And if they had to choose a place to park, why pick one that's slap on the route to the gun position?"

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"Nobody thinks it's your fault," said the Major soothingly. "It's a mystery how they got there at all. They didn't check in at any of the pickets. If you ask me, it's damned fishy. And I hear the police found more than a hundred pounds in notes when they searched the—what was left."

"Rather them than me," said the Major.

"The man I'm really sorry for is Land," went on the Troop Commander. "It was a bit of a fluke that he should have been driving a gun at all. He's Troop Mechanic now. It was only because Higgins was on leave that he volunteered—"

"No one blames him, either," said the Major. "All the same, it's nasty. Perhaps we could get him shifted."

"I wouldn't want to lose him," said the Troop Commander. "He's a very steady chap indeed. But you may be right."

The Dean of Barchester, some time later, received an oddly wrapped parcel through the post. He opened it cautiously and two cocoa tins rolled out. They contained just under two hundred pounds, all in one-pound notes, and a piece of paper with the words *From a Friend* printed on it. He is used to receiving odd donations, but would dearly like to know who was the sender of this one.

Since Gunner Davie Land is at Badhausen with his new regiment, the Dean is most unlikely to learn the truth.

★ ★ ★

## *A NIGHT AT THE OPERA*

**The old reproach that the British are not interested in opera is far from true nowadays, and almost everyone knows which side his Bride is Bartered on. Can you identify composer and opera in each of the instances given below—all of which relate to operas that have been performed in this country in recent years?**

**Answers—a round 20—are found on page 69.**

1. *In what opera do you find*
   - *a. a father helping to kidnap his daughter*
   - *b. the hero drinking whisky and soda*
   - *c. three distinct dance tunes played simultaneously*
   - *d. the heroine telling her own fortune at cards*
   - *e. the hero entering pursued by a serpent*

2. *What opera is founded on a*
   - *a. French (but world-famous) fairy-tale*
   - *b. Round Table story*
   - *c. poem by Crabbe, English eighteenth-century poet*
   - *d. novel by Dumas fils*
   - *e. New Testament story*

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# Deep Range

**Silently he dropped twenty fathoms there was a killer loose—**

by ARTHUR C. CLARKE

THERE was a killer loose on the range. A 'copter patrol, five hundred miles off Greenland, had seen the great corpse staining the sea crimson as it wallowed in the waves. Within seconds, the intricate warning system had been alerted: men were plotting circles and moving counters on the North Atlantic chart—and Don Burley was still rubbing the sleep from his eyes as he dropped silently down to the twenty-fathom line.

The pattern of green lights on the telltale was a glowing symbol of security. As long as that pattern was unchanged, as long as none of those emerald stars winked to red, all was well with Don and his tiny craft. Air, fuel, power—this was the triumvirate that ruled his life. If any of them failed, he would be sinking in a steel coffin down towards the pelagic ooze, as Johnnie Tyndall had done the season before last. But there was no reason why they should fail; the accidents one foresaw, Don told himself reassuringly, were never the ones that happened.

He leaned across the tiny control board and spoke into the mike. Sub 5 was still close enough to the mother ship for radio to work, but before long he'd have to switch to the sonics.

"Setting course 255, speed 50 knots, depth 20 fathoms, full sonar coverage. Estimated time to target area, 70 minutes. Will report at 10 minute intervals. That is all. Out."

The acknowledgment, already weakening with range, came back at once from the *Herman Melville*: "Message received and understood. Good hunting. What about the hounds?"

Don chewed his lower lip thoughtfully. This might be a job he'd have to handle alone. He had no idea, to within fifty miles either way, where Benjie and Susan were at the moment. They'd certainly follow if he signalled for them, but they couldn't maintain his speed and would soon have to drop behind. Besides, he might be heading for a pack of killers, and the last thing he wanted to do was to lead his carefully trained porpoises into trouble. That was common sense and good business. Also, he was very fond of Susan and Benjie.

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" It's too far, and I don't know what I'm running into," he replied. " If they're in the interception area when I get there, I may whistle them up."

The acknowledgment from the mother ship was barely audible, and Don switched off the set. It was time to look around.

He dimmed the cabin lights so that he could see the scanner screen more clearly, pulled the polarscope glasses down over his eyes, and peered into the depths. This was the moment when Don felt like a god, able to hold within his hands a circle of the Atlantic twenty miles across, and to see clear down to the still-unexplored deeps, three thousand fathoms below.

The slowly rotating beam of inaudible sound was searching the world in which he floated, seeking out friend and foe in the eternal darkness where light could never penetrate. The pattern of soundless shrieks, too shrill even for the hearing of the bats who had invented sonar a million years before man, pulsed out into the watery night: faint echoes came tingling back, were captured and amplified, and became floating blue-green flecks on the screen.

Through long practice, Don could read their message with effortless ease. A thousand feet below, stretching out to his submerged horizon, was the scattering layer—the blanket of life that covered half the world. The sunken meadow of the sea, it rose and fell with the passage of the sun, hovering always at the edge of darkness. During the short summer night it had floated almost to the surface, but the dawn had now driven it back into the depths.

It was no obstacle to his sonar. Don could see clear through its tenuous substance to the ooze of the Atlantic floor, over which he was driving as high as a cloud above the earth. But the ultimate depths were no concern of his. The flocks he guarded and the enemies who ravaged them belonged to the upper levels of the sea.

Don flicked the switch of the depth-selector, and his sonar beam concentrated itself into the horizontal plane. The glimmering echoes from the abyss vanished, but he could see more clearly what lay around him here in the ocean's stratospheric heights. That glowing cloud two miles ahead was a school of fish; he wondered if Base knew about it, and made an entry in his log. There were some larger, isolated blips at the edge of the school—the carnivores pursuing the cattle, ensuring that the endlessly turning wheel of life and death would never lose momentum. But this conflict was no affair of Don's: he was after bigger game . . .

Sub 5 drove on towards the west, a steel needle swifter and

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more deadly than any other creature that roamed the seas. The tiny cabin, lit only by the flicker of lights from the instrument board, pulsed with power as the spinning turbines thrust the water aside. Don glanced at the chart and noted that he was already halfway to the scene of the crime.

That meant little: there was no way of telling when it had been committed, nor in which direction the killer—or killers—had gone. If they had fled to the west, they might run into Evans in Sub 3; it was just as likely that they would escape to north or south, where there was no coverage for almost two hundred miles. The North Atlantic was so damn big . . .

He wondered how the enemy had broken through this time. There were still many weak points, for fencing the oceans of the world had been a gigantic task. The tenuous electric fields, fanning out between generators many miles apart, could not always hold at bay the starving monsters of the deep. They were learning, too. When the fences were opened, they would sometimes slip through with the whales and wreak havoc before they were discovered.

The long-range receiver bleeped plaintively, and Don switched over to TRANSCRIBE. It wasn't practical to send speech any distance over an ultrasonic beam, and code had come back into its own. Don had never learnt to read it by ear, but the ribbon of paper emerging from the slot saved him the trouble.

> COPTER REPORTS SCHOOL 50 WHALES HEADING 95 DEGREES GRID REF X186475 Y438034 STOP MOVING AT SPEED STOP MELVILLE OUT

Don started to set the co-ordinates on the plotting grid, then saw that it was no longer necessary. At the extreme edge of his screen, a flotilla of faint stars had appeared. He altered course slightly, and drove head-on towards the approaching herd.

The 'copter was right: they were moving fast. Don felt a mounting excitement, for this could mean that they were on the run and luring the killers towards him. At their rate of travelling, they would be on him in five minutes. He cut the motors and felt the backward tug of water bringing him swiftly to rest.

Don Burley, a knight in armour, sat in his tiny dim-lit room fifty feet below the bright Atlantic waves, testing his weapons for the conflict that lay ahead. In these moments of poised suspense, before action began, his racing brain often explored such fantasies. He felt a kinship with all shepherds who had guarded their flocks, from the dawn of time. He was David, among the ancient Palestinian hills, alert for the mountain lions that would prey upon his father's sheep.

But far nearer in time, and far closer in spirit, were the men

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who had marshalled the great herds of cattle on the American plains, only a few lifetimes ago. They would have understood his work, though his implements would have been magic to them. The pattern was the same; only the scale had altered. It made no fundamental difference that the beasts Don herded weighed almost a hundred tons, and browsed on the endless savannahs of the sea.

The school was now less than two miles away, and Don checked his scanner's continuous circling to concentrate on the sector ahead. The picture on the screen altered to a fan-shaped wedge as the sonar beam started to flick from side to side: now he could count every whale in the school, and even make a good estimate of its size. With a practised eye, he began to look for stragglers.

Don could never have explained what drew him at once towards those four echoes at the southern fringe of the school. It is true that they were a little apart from the rest, but others had fallen as far behind. There is some sixth sense that a man acquires when he has stared long enough into a sonar screen—some hunch that enables him to extract more from the moving flecks than he has any right to do.

Without conscious thought, Don reached for the control that would start the turbines whirling into life. Sub 5 was just getting under way when three leaden thuds reverberated through the hull, as if someone was knocking on the front door and wanted to come in.

"Well, I'm damned," said Don. "How did *you* get here?" He did not bother to switch on the TV: he'd have known Benjie's signal anywhere.

The porpoises must have been in the neighbourhood and spotted him before he'd even switched on the hunting-call. For the thousandth time, he marvelled at their intelligence and loyalty. It was strange that Nature had played the same trick twice—on land with the dog, in the ocean with the porpoise. Why were these graceful sea-beasts so fond of man, to whom they owed so little? It made one feel that the human race was worth something after all, if it could inspire such unselfish devotion.

It had been known for centuries that the porpoise was at least as intelligent as the dog, and could obey quite complex verbal commands. The experiment was still in progress, but if it succeeded, then the ancient partnership between shepherd and sheep-dog would have a new lease of life.

Don switched on the speakers recessed into the sub's hull and began to talk to his escorts. Most of the sounds he uttered

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would have been meaningless to other human ears: they were the product of long research by the animal psychologists of the World Food Administration. He gave his orders twice to make sure that they were understood, then checked with the sonar screen to see that Benjie and Susan were following astern as he had told them to.

The four echoes that had attracted his attention were clearer and closer now, and the main body of the whale pack had swept past him to the east. He had no fear of a collision: the great animals, even in their panic, could sense his presence as easily as he could detect theirs, and by similar means. Don wondered if he should switch on his beacon. They might recognize its sound pattern, and it would reassure them. But the unknown enemy might recognize it, too.

He closed for an interception, and hunched low over the screen as if to drag from it by sheer will-power every scrap of information the scanner could give. There were two large echoes, some distance apart, and one was accompanied by a pair of smaller satellites. Don wondered if he was already too late. In his mind's eye, he could picture the death struggle taking place in the water less than a mile ahead. Those two fainter blips would be the enemy—either shark or grampus—worrying a whale while one of its companions stood by in helpless terror, with no weapons of defence except its mighty flukes.

Now he was almost close enough for vision. The TV camera in Sub 5's prow strained through the gloom, but at first showed nothing but the fog of plankton. Then a vast shadowy shape began to form in the centre of the screen, with two smaller companions below it. Don was seeing, with the greater precision but hopelessly limited range of ordinary light, what the sonar scanners had already told him.

Almost at once he saw his mistake. The two satellites were calves, not sharks. It was the first time he had ever met a whale with twins; although multiple births were not unknown, a cow could only suckle two young at once and usually only the stronger would survive. He choked down his disappointment: this error had cost him many minutes and he must begin the search again.

Then, on the hull, came the frantic tattoo that meant danger. It wasn't easy to scare Benjie, and Don shouted his reassurance as he swung Sub 5 round so that the camera could search the turgid waters. Automatically, he had turned towards the fourth blip on the sonar screen—the echo he had assumed, from its size, to be another adult whale. And he saw that, after all, he had come to the right place.

"Heavens!" he said softly. "I didn't know they came that

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big." He'd seen larger sharks before, but they had all been harmless vegetarians. This, he could tell at a glance, was a killer shark, from the northern seas. It was supposed to grow up to thirty feet long, but this specimen was even bigger than Sub 5. It was every inch of forty feet from snout to tail, and when he spotted it, it was already turning in towards the kill. Like the coward it was, it had launched its attack at one of the calves.

Don yelled to Benjie and Susan, and saw them racing ahead into his field of vision. He wondered fleetingly why porpoises had such an overwhelming hatred of sharks; then he loosed his hands from the controls as the autopilot locked onto the target. Twisting and turning as agilely as any other sea-creature of its size, Sub 5 began to close in upon the shark, leaving Don free to concentrate on his armament.

The killer had been so intent upon its prey that Benjie caught it completely unawares, ramming it just behind the left eye. It must have been a painful blow: an iron-hard snout, backed by a mighty weight of muscle moving at fifty miles an hour, is something not to be jeered at, even by the largest fish. The shark jerked round in an impossibly tight curve, and Don was almost jolted out of his seat as the sub snapped onto a new course. If this kept up, he'd find it hard to use his Sting. But at least the killer was too busy now to bother about its intended victims.

Benjie and Susan were worrying the giant like dogs snapping at the heels of an angry bear. They were too agile to be caught in those ferocious jaws, and Don marvelled at the co-ordination with which they worked. When either surfaced for air, the other would hold off for a minute until the attack could be resumed in strength.

There was no evidence that the shark realized that a far more dangerous adversary was closing in upon it, and that the porpoises were merely a distraction. That suited Don very nicely: the next operation was going to be difficult unless he could hold a steady course for at least fifteen seconds. At a pinch he could use the tiny rocket torps to make a kill—if he'd been alone and faced with a pack of sharks, he would certainly have done so. But it was messy, and there was a better way. He preferred the technique of the rapier to that of the hand-grenade.

Now he was only fifty feet away, and closing rapidly. There might never be a better chance. He punched the launching-stud.

From beneath the belly of the sub, something that looked like a sting-ray hurtled forward. Don had checked the speed of his own craft: there was no need to come any closer now. The tiny, arrow-shaped hydrofoil, only a couple of feet across, could move far faster than his vessel and would close the gap in seconds.

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As it raced forward, it spun out the thin line of the control wire, like some underwater spider laying its thread.

Along that wire passed the energy that powered the Sting, and the signals that steered it to its goal. Don had completely ignored his own larger craft in the effort of guiding this underwater missile: it responded to his touch so swiftly that he felt he was controlling some sensitive, high-spirited steed.

The shark saw the danger less than a second before impact. The resemblance of the Sting to an ordinary ray confused it, as the designers had intended. Before the tiny brain could realize that no ray behaved like this, the missile had struck. The steel hypodermic, rammed forward by an exploding cartridge, drove through the shark's horny skin, and the great fish erupted in a frenzy of terror.

Don backed rapidly away, for a blow from that tail would rattle him around like a pea in a can, and might even cause damage to the sub. There was nothing more for him to do, except to speak into the microphone and call off his hounds.

The doomed killer was trying to arch its body so that it could snap at the poisoned dart. Don had now reeled the Sting back into its hiding-place, pleased that he had been able to retrieve the missile undamaged. He watched without pity as the great fish succumbed to its paralysis.

Its struggles were weakening. It was swimming aimlessly back and forth, and once Don had to side-step smartly to avoid a collision. As it lost control of buoyancy, the dying shark drifted up to the surface. Don did not bother to follow; that could wait until he had attended to more important business.

He found the cow and her two calves less than a mile away, and inspected them carefully. They were uninjured, so there was no need to call the vet in his highly specialized two-man sub which could handle any cetological crisis from a stomach-ache to a Caesarean. Don noted the mother's number, stencilled just behind the flippers. The calves, as was obvious from their size, were this season's and had not yet been branded.

Don watched for a little while. They were no longer in the least alarmed, and a check on the sonar had shown that the whole school had ceased its panicky flight. He wondered how they knew what had happened; much had been learnt about communication among whales, but much was still a mystery.

"I hope you appreciate what I've done for you, old lady," he muttered. Then, reflecting that fifty tons of mother love was a slightly awe-inspiring sight, he blew his tanks and surfaced.

It was calm, so he cracked the airlock and popped his head out

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of the tiny conning-tower. The water was only inches below his chin, and from time to time a wave made a determined effort to swamp him.

There was little danger of this happening, for he fitted the hatch so closely that he was quite an effective plug.

Fifty feet away, a long slate-coloured mound, like an overturned boat, was rolling on the surface. Don looked at it thoughtfully and did some mental calculations. A brute this size should be valuable: with any luck there was a chance of a double bonus. In a few minutes he'd radio his report, but for the moment it was pleasant to drink the fresh Atlantic air and to feel the open sky above his head.

A grey thunderbolt shot up out of the depths and smashed back on the surface of the water, smothering Don with spray. It was just Benjie's modest way of drawing attention to himself: a moment later the porpoise had swum up to the conning-tower, so that Don could reach down and tickle its head.

The great intelligent eyes stared back into his: was it pure imagination, or did an almost human sense of fun also lurk in their depths?

Susan, as usual, circled shyly at a distance until jealousy overpowered her and she butted Benjie out of the way. Don distributed caresses impartially and apologized because he had nothing to give them. He undertook to make up for the omission as soon as he returned to the *Herman Melville*.

"I'll go for another swim with you, too," he promised, "as long as you behave yourselves next time." He rubbed thoughtfully at a large bruise caused by Benjie's playfulness, and wondered if he was not getting too old for rough games like this.

"Time to go home," Don said firmly, sliding down into the cabin and slamming the hatch. He suddenly realized that he was very hungry, and had better do something about breakfast. There were not many men on earth who had earned a better right to eat their morning meal. He had saved for humanity more tons of meat, oil, and milk than could easily be estimated.

Don Burley was the happy warrior, coming home from one battle that man would always have to fight. He was holding at bay the spectre of famine that had confronted all earlier ages, but would never threaten the world again while the great plankton farms harvested their millions of tons of protein, and the whale herds obeyed their new masters. Man had come back to the sea after æons of exile: until the oceans froze, he would never be hungry again . . .

Don glanced at the scanner as he set his course. He smiled as he saw the two echoes keeping pace with the central splash of

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light that marked his vessel. "Hang around," he said. "We mammals must stick together."

Then, as the autopilot took over, he lay back in his chair.

And presently Benjie and Susan heard a most peculiar noise, rising and falling against the drone of the turbines. It had filtered faintly through the thick walls of Sub 5, and only the sensitive ears of the porpoises could have detected it. But intelligent beasts though they were, they could hardly be expected to understand why Don Burley was announcing, in a highly unmusical voice, that he was *Heading for the last round-up . . .*

* * *

## *STATION SYREN*

She sat with a Warwick Deeping,
Her legs curl'd round in a ring,
Like a beautiful panther sleeping,
Yet always ready to spring.

Tweed on her well-knit torso,
Silk on each big strong leg,
An officer's lady—and more so
Than those who buy off the peg.

More cash than she knew of for spending
As a Southgate girl at home,
For there's crooning and clinging unending
For the queen of the girls at the 'drome.

Beautiful brown eyes burning
Deep on the Deeping page,
Beautiful dark hair learning
Coiffuring tricks of the age.

Negligent hand for holding
A Flight-Lieutenant at bay,
Petulant lips for scolding
And kissing the trouble away.

But she isn't exactly partial
To any of that sort of thing,
So maybe the Air Vice-Marshal
Will buy her a Bravington ring.

JOHN BETJEMAN

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# A Man Up An Elm Tree

**"Not one warm little bachelor," Ceinwen lamented "—not one"**

by RHYS DAVIES

WHEN the corpse of her husband, whom she had not seen for seventeen years, was delivered to Mari Evans's farmhouse it caused her a most disagreeable upset.

Not only was the farm busy in the last days of harvest, with all her daughters out in the fields and her alone in the house, but a most disordering sense of guilt sprang up in her from its hiding-place, quick after the first shock of this peremptory delivery of the body. She had not been informed that her husband was on his way to her, alive or dead. "Wife of John Evans you are?" was all one of the two green-uniformed men said when she opened the door to their knock. An unvarnished coffin, made of cheap boxwood, lay on a sort of stretcher behind them. The engine of their motor van in the lane had not been shut off.

"Not one word to warn me!" she stormed at the men as they carried the coffin—it even looked dirty—into the house. "No feelings they've got in that place?" The guilt made her the more vehement. Cerise of cheek, and still under fifty, she looked a ripely handsome widow despite her wrath. "Bringing him back like this! In *that*!"

"We've got a letter from the Superintendent's office," said one of the asylum men, unconcerned. They laid the paltry coffin across two chairs in the best parlour where she had led them, and, unaware that he was adding fuel to the burning guilt, the other man explained, "The office had to phone the policeman in your village to find if your husband's next of kin was still living here. The policeman said you and daughters were here just the same, so we brought the deceased, along with the letter that would have been posted to you yesterday, otherwise. He went sudden, I think."

As the widow gazed in horror at the box, he laid the letter on a table and, apologetic now, added, "Our Superintendent is

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away on holiday this month, and his office is very busy just now. Mention there'll be in the letter about the coffin; our usual one it is." Underlings not responsible for this official disregard of human emotions, they edged towards the door, and were gone.

Did she deserve this? For another minute, but backing away, she stared at the coffin. Then she snatched up the horn of an old-style gramophone standing on the chiffonier and ran out to the yard behind the house. Setting the horn in turn towards east, north, and west, she trumpeted the names, in the order of their birth, of her daughters: Cadi, Marged, Gwynneth, Ceinwen, Efa.

At the noise, rooks took black flight from a cluster of elms fringing a nearby meadow, in which three dozen Welsh-faced sheep looked up, censorious of the disturbance. A despot since her husband's breakdown—and even before that event—she looked like a roused Queen Boadicea calling her clan of warriors to battle.

From the fields of ripened wheat where they laboured like men paid full union rates, her downtrodden daughters came hurrying to this unusual summons. Only Efa, lackadaisical as her namesake of Eden, dawdled as though the world and all its time were before her: she was nineteen and seemed to be admiring the landscape while her mother, horn still in hand, waited in the cobbled yard. It was a lonely and beautiful landscape, uninhabited hills soaring to the moist blue in the far distance; but a glimpse of Miskin village, where men lived, could be seen below, looking deceptively near and peaceful.

"I thought the house was on fire," Cadi panted, arriving first. Her mother, motionless now, stood staring bemused at the group of elms.

Marged, the only daughter who wore trousers, demanded crossly: "What's the matter? Not another war?" The horn hadn't been used like that since the last war was declared, an insurance collector having brought the news to the isolated farm. Mari never would spend money on a radio set, which in any case might unsettle her daughters' minds with its frivolous programmes. She believed that the business of working a farm and of rearing, without aid of husband, five daughters cannot be done by living soft and cosy.

Efa entered the gate at last, and Mari, still without a word, led the five into the house and down the sunset-reddened passage to the parlour. "A visitor has come?" asked Ceinwen, pushing forward for the first glimpse of such a phenomenon.

"A widow I am!" Mari groaned, pointing dramatically. "Your poor dead father has been brought back to you in *that*."

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But the bereaved daughters did not show the high concern of the widow. So long had their father been "put away" that almost he had ceased to exist for them, except as a dark, and more or less unspoken reminder that they had an ominous blight in the family. The first four children could remember, in a vague way, his demeanour and flavour, but he had disappeared for ever before affection could be induced in any measure; Efa had no awareness of him at all.

What interested them now was the behaviour of their mother. They had never seen her undone like this, never heard her whimpering and moaning like an ordinary human being at the mercy of a cruel world.

Gwynneth stood gaping, sniffing the new atmosphere; and Marged, hard and curt of disposition, suddenly ordered her to fetch a screwdriver. Cadi, tall and sorrel-tinted like her mother, observed judiciously, "Well, perhaps better off he is now." Plump and soft-looking Ceinwen, always thirsty in the fields, waddled away to the kitchen to brew a pot of tea. Only easy-going Efa, pretty and curly-headed as a tawny chrysanthemum, sat down and took off her field boots; she assumed, mistakenly, that her mother would command a cessation of the day's toil now, harvest though it was and the weather holding good.

Marged, screwdriver in hand, said, "Let us have a look at him."

When she began to unscrew the thin lid, her mother burst into further cries, plainly of fear. What was the matter with her? Exchanging glances, the daughters watched her but offered no comfort. She had removed herself too long into supreme and bossy authority, and such Caesars rarely obtain human comfort when they have received sore blows.

Lifting off the lid, Marged challenged her mother, "There he is. Come on, take your look."

"Shrunk he has," Cadi said, taking a bold look, "and all his hair gone. So thin and stern! He's like a man not belonging to anyone."

"They must have starved him in that place," pursued Marged, relentless. "What can you expect of a free-of-charge asylum that's always crowded like a Michaelmas fair?"

Gwynneth and Efa, catching the subtle note of triumph of their older sisters, took their looks into the coffin and unitedly expressed their *Oh's!* of dismay. None of them could believe that their mother's remorse and terror went very deep. Ceinwen, bringing in the tea and a round of fruit cake, took her brief glance at her father and said to the widow in ironical scepticism too, "Come on, a cup of tea will give you strength." Even

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pet magpie, flying into the parlour, alighted on the edge of the coffin and cocked an eye inside.

" What did he die of, I wonder? " pursued Marged, in whose swearing, masculine-cast mind her mother's bossiness had always rankled most. " Loneliness, was it? "

Justice often is tardy in arrival, but it comes. Crouching away, collapsing into a chair, refusing the tea, Mari cried, " Oh, I ought to have gone to see him every week! Always saying, ' Next week I will take him fresh eggs and a cold chicken.' But never finding the time to go."

" I never heard you saying it," observed Marged, driving the magpie away and replacing the lid.

" To myself I used to say it," wept Mari, oddly unable to retaliate in her old autocratic style. Catching sight of the letter on the table, she asked her first-born to read it. She could not read herself and was able to write only her signature, though, an expert mistress of crops and cattle since an early age, she had treasure in the bank, and also a pig's bladder full of gold sovereigns tied to a hidden rafter of the house.

Cadi, sipping tea while she read the letter, said, " It only says that John Evans died suddenly of coronary thrombosis—what is that, I wonder? And there's a piece about the coffin." She read out: " *A charge of five guineas will be made if the coffin is retained for burial, but if not required the Asylum must be informed and the coffin will be collected in due course by our van.* It's signed by Owen Williams, Clerk to the Superintendent."

Mari, briefly reviving, took great umbrage. " Who wants their second-hand coffin? Used many times before, no doubt. Oh, a lot of heartless ruffians they are in that asylum."

" Hearts are out of place in an asylum," hummed Ceinwen.

Efa's magpie—which she had captured and tamed that summer, lacking anything else on which to vent her loving disposition—had perched on her shoulder. Caressing it and feeding it with fruit-cake, she said: " We will have to have a funeral."

Her sisters lowered their cups of tea. Even her mother's woe was arrested a little. Fed, the magpie flew off, jumped on the coffin lid and excitedly squawked there, its feet dancing; very intelligent, it always caught the prevailing mood of the house and when dispute was rife it would shriek raucous as any of the sisters or their ruler.

" Black clothes and hats," Gwynneth nodded. " Shoes and silk stockings."

Their mother gazed at the coffin with an extraordinarily humble submission. At last she crossed to it and spread her fingers tremblingly on the lid, so that the magpie, still squawking

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as if its throat would burst with something important to say scampered away to the edge.

" Gold," the widow whimpered, " pure gold is inside this box! He shall have a funeral. A coffin they call this? The box of a tramp! A funeral he shall have that will be the talk of Miskin and the farms for years to come. Yes, full mourning for us all." Then she ordered her first-born to fetch the precious heirloom lace tablecloth from the press and cover this unseemly coffin with it.

" Time it is," observed Marged tartly, "that we showed everyone we are a well-off family."

Efa said, " Fresh clothes we all need, certain enough. Black handbags can we buy, too? "

None of them had ever possessed handbags or the other knick-knacks of their sex, and they rarely experienced entertainment. Mari had for ever kept her purse-strings tight. By dint of the punishment-stick of childhood, belittling their aspects and characters, and keeping them protected from the dangerous world on her tucked-away acres, she had subdued them early. Even now, on market-day trips to the town, they were shooed home as soon as farm business was done. Never a cinema, a café meal, or an evening trot through the streets where the young farmers let their importuning eyes roam in search of likely sweethearts. Kept in leash like this, what opportunities had they to find husbands?

Efa had raised this point oftener than her sisters. Her mother would say, with some truth, that young men were not likely to cast a favourable eye on a family that had such a skeleton in the cupboard. Her own blighted marriage, though it had yielded five daughters in quick succession, seemed to have created a mania to keep them close to her on the lonely farm, where also they were so productive of profit, money being the only real safety on earth. But, of course, now that they were full-size they smouldered penniless in the thought of revolution, waiting for signs of decay in her. Had the first sign come?

Taking no notice of the request for handbags, but very raised up now, as often the parsimonious are when at last they decide to loosen themselves for an occasion, she resumed, " A tombstone memorial fit for a king he shall have. Tomorrow I will buy a patch of land in the cemetery big enough to hold us all."

" A will was he allowed to make, perhaps? " murmured his pretty last daughter. It was shortly after her birth that he had gone totally into his strange vexation and was found up one of the elm trees near the house, where he had remained hidden for a day and night, the village-policeman having been informed of his disappearance.

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" Only this farm he owned," Mari declared, " and I am full and legal owner of it now. Back to the fields! " There would be enough light for two hours' work yet.

" Watered black poplin I shall choose," Ceinwen bleated, going. " It rustles well-off as one walks."

Cadi, draping the lace tablecloth over the closed box, remarked cryptically, " It ought to be stood up open to keep us reminded."

They dreaded that the shock would wear off and Mari would change her mind about the mourning-clothes and the other displays of remorse for her conjugal neglect. But she kept her word, and, during the five days between receipt and burial of her husband's body, subdued the remorse in the most extravagant acts of expiation.

A spacious car was hired to take her excited daughters to Swansea, where they spent the length of daylight in a store and returned laden like a caravan of the East. All the other accoutrements of loving mourning were ordered at their costliest.

" Surely," Efa said to her sisters, trying on her hat, " an egg or two we're laying for hatching? Men will arrive out of all this? "

Announcement of the funeral was sent to all the local farms and houses of consequence. The widow cooked two whole hams. Cadi made fancy cakes; Marged baked several loaves; Gwynneth concocted rich trifles; Ceinwen, an expert poacher, snatched trout from the forbidden Miskin river and glazed them; and Efa went off on the bicycle to order whisky, sherry, and port at the Red Lion pub in Miskin.

A fine oak coffin arrived on the day before the funeral, and the undertaker's men shut themselves into the parlour for the task of removing the body from the five-guinea box to the thirty-guinea casket.

When these men had gone, Mari, who had been strange and bemused all that day, commanded, " Take that asylum box to the sties. A trough for the pigs' feed it will make."

Cadi, sounding oddly like her mother, exclaimed in protest, " The letter said the cost of it is five guineas."

" To the sties with it! " She continued to breadcrumb the hams, and further commanded her daughters to put the lid in the barn, where it could be used for patching a draughty hole in the wall.

No man or woman of Miskin district had ever been buried with such pomp. The widow of John Evans not only made amends for his ill-starred life but struck down at one blow her reputation for being close-fisted and closeting her daughters from showing their advantages to the world.

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At noon on the funeral day neighbouring farmers, in oval black hats and vicugna odorous of moth-balls, had turned up in force. Mari Evans, the she-farmer who had profitably turned all her daughters into labourers that, being daughters, need not be paid union rates of pay—Mari Evans, a Tartar at driving a bargain in market, was respected by these farmers, though they gazed in shocked amazement at the six gigantic wreaths of shop flowers.

And all along the miles to the cemetery, passing through three villages, everyone came out to view the procession of eight black cars, packed with worth-while people of the district, and the decked hearse followed by a limousine containing the fashionably dressed family mourners.

It was Mari, magnificently statuesque as a queen able to endure great tribulation, who seemed to get all the attention. Back in the house after the burial, even optimistic Efa grumbled, " All these men married or elderly! I couldn't see one warm little bachelor weeping for us, not one."

" Bachelors or not," Ceinwen lamented, " men's thoughts are not for such matter in a funeral."

" They were around *her* like bees," Marged grunted. " She's got the money."

In the house was that flat aftermath air of such events. There was not even the reading of a will to distract them, for, being out of his senses, their father had no legal right to make a will. Their day of splendour was over. By five o'clock, the ham, trout, sweetmeats, and drink consumed, all the sympathisers had departed.

The last to go was Shinkin Parry, owner of many local acres. With him Mari had remained in close parlour confabulation. She looked into the living-room, where her daughters still sat about in their finery, and commanded them to change into their working-clothes; the pigs and poultry needed feed and, at the field gate, the three unmilked cows were complaining.

Already changed herself into an old black blouse and skirt rummaged from the past, she announced, " A talk I had with Shinkin Parry. I am hiring from him the Melan fields for ploughing. Barley we'll sow in them."

They cried out. The Melan fields! Soil requiring the labour of giants to free it of stones and briers. Was there not sweating toil enough for them already? She was back to her old tricks after all. Guilt and remorse had not really undone her.

She said, " A big hole has been made in our money today. Will husbands ever come to keep you? *Your* futures I am thinking of—do I spend money on myself? Your poor father's monument is to cost a hundred pounds. A column of marble I've

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ordered, and a size proper for a grave that is to hold us all. We must work."

"Men go on strike!" Marged scowled. She ventured an oath, and muttered, "Greedy old hog."

"Certain it is," fumed Gwynneth, "that the Melan fields will send us to that grave quite early. Let the mason make haste with the column."

"Bury me in my black poplin," spat Ceinwen, rustling about the room in it, "and put on my horny hands my black gloves. I want to look a lady in my coffin."

Mari took no notice. It was always her policy to allow them, by tongue, free and even insulting expression of their views, women being appeased by this. She would have her way. Her act of expiation was done, and ordinary life must be resumed.

During the next few days they muttered and smouldered among themselves. But the old childhood pattern of obedience held them. They would never achieve the drastic mutiny of leaving home to hire themselves out as common farmworkers elsewhere. In their own home they were heiresses and ladies. And Mari must die some day. Then the farm, together with the money in the bank and the bladder of sovereigns, would be theirs.

Unless, of course, she married again. As Efa mocked incitingly to her sisters in the fields, "Never one to waste time! Another husband she'll get yet. Fresh roses in her cheeks and the owner of a farm with five meek-and-mild labourers!"

"It's that monument mason she goes to see," Cadi decided. "He's a widower, and if she gets round him she'll have the column cost price."

It seemed feasible that Mari was going out courting. Wearing her expensive black, she had already made three mysterious trips from the farm, arriving back from the last looking pleased with herself, and mentioning that the mason had begun work on the memorial stone.

"Six little white marble doves I've chosen," she had said. "They will stand on the steps under the column. Two guineas a dove the mason wanted to charge, but I bargained and got the six for ten pounds."

"Serpents," Marged had growled, "they ought to be."

On a Monday afternoon exactly one week after the funeral, a small car chuffed up to the farm gate. Out of it jumped a young man. Mari was at home but all her daughters were out in the fields, ploughing for next season's sowing. She opened the door to the young man's knock and, to his affable inquiry, acknowledged that she was Mrs. Mari Evans.

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"I am from Plas Carmarthen Asylum," he announced, rubbing his hands like an optimistic debt-collector certain of his prey.

She lifted an arm and pointed a finger. "Your coffin is over there in the sties. Empty the pigs' feed out of it, and be off. Lid is in the barn." Not out of this swelling woman would five guineas be got.

He put his hand against the door she was about to shut. "Never mind about the coffin!" he assured. "Ask me in, please; I am here on important business with you and family."

Her sultry eye shone alert. Had John been allowed to make a will, after all? She admitted the respectably dressed young man. His nervous legs whisking in, he complimented, "A fine spick-and-span farm you've got here, and a beauty of an old house!"

In the living-room, as she stood suspiciously forbidding, his flattering manner increased. He praised the sixteenth-century room thick-walled as a fortress, the opulent old china on the dresser. His popping eyes roved about, insecure and shifty as his smile.

"Your business?" she demanded.

"Take off your black clothes!" he said, preliminary as a doctor, but smiling at her so wide that his dry-looking tongue could be seen.

A man from the asylum! Backing away, she said, half soothing, half threatening, "I will call my daughters . . . *Cadi!*" she shouted, uselessly, since they were all too far afield to hear "*Marged!*—"

Dazzling with the happy tidings he bore, he clapped his hands. "Stop! You must be the first to hear the good news. Your husband John Evans, aged fifty-three, is alive! There now!"

She turned from the door. "Buried he was a week ago—" she began to mumble.

"No, no! Not *your* John Evans. Another John Evans was sent to this farm. A little mistake. *Two* John Evanses we had on our register, see?" And as no word came from her open mouth, he said, suddenly going severe and blustering, "Why is it you didn't send the corpse back to us? Along with our coffin? Didn't you take a last look at what was supposed to be your own husband, same as all wives do? You buried a man you had no right to. Why?"

Still no word came from her, and, blinking his eyes, he added: "Lucky it is that the dead John Evans got no relations to make a fuss about it."

"Ha!" she panted. "Ha!"

And, before he could say more, she ran to fetch the gramophone horn, sped out to the yard, and called her brood. When

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with wet brow but unable to wait for the five to assemble, she crept back to the living-room, the young man had become even more jumpy. "What is it you are telling me?" she mumbled, in a weak little voice.

He babbled, watching her out of the corner of his eye, "Not very often can I bring good news like this! The car out there came to you fast as I could make it go. All the way from Plas Carmarthen for me to tell you in person. 'No,' I said to Dr. Llewellyn, our Superintendent, '*no*, not a letter; I will go to Mrs. Evans in person.'" He coughed behind his jerking Adam's apple. "Mistakes are made everywhere, and Dr. Llewellyn was on holiday, and very busy we've been, only a spare-time deputy superintendent coming in while Dr. Llewellyn was on holiday—"

"*You* it was that sent the body?" she panted.

"A mistake!" he pleaded. "Not the first one that's been made in this world. Like this it was, you see: only this morning the Superintendent returned from holiday, and after he looked at the register and saw the deaths and discharges and admittances he went on his rounds of the wards as usual, knowing all the old patients by name and history." He swallowed, but plucked up voice again. "And there, in the Hafod ward, he saw your husband John Evans. 'Why,' he said, 'dead you are!'

"Then out came the little mistake, see? It was John Evans in the Tenby ward, a new patient who had been sent from the workhouse in Swansea, that had gone from thrombosis; but your one it was that I ticked off in the register when the nurse came to tell me in the office. So busy we are and short-staffed, and behind with everything—" His smile came out entreating once more. "But happy news for you! Your husband is quite well, but not ready to be discharged yet. The pleasure you will give me of driving you to the asylum to see him? There and back."

She whispered, "Over three hundred pounds spent and gone!" She sat down, got up; she went pale, grew red. Sounds like sinking groans came from her. But when her daughters, even Efa prompt for once, arrived, she drew a little strength and cried out, "One of you go to the mason. At once! On the bicycle. Stop the work on the monument!"

"My car—" began the young man. At the entrance of the five daughters he had begun to retreat towards a corner. His gaze roamed feverish over the swarm, and, in the way natural to man, skimmed longest over unruined Efa, who always smiled a polite welcome at sight of any young man.

In a few words from down her chest, Mari informed her daughters of the awful event. Only Efa, brushing aside her magpie that had flown in too, left the room during the ensuing

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clamour and, very quick for her, reappeared dressed in her smart black. " I will go to the mason," she tried to make herself heard above the noise. " Your car? " she hinted to the young man.

His false jerk of energy was vanishing before this covey of daughters arrived strong and healthy from the fields, and already he was too far gone to notice that, under their exclamations, no real wrath was directed at him. It was towards their mother that their eyes darted, interested. Shrunk and reduced, Mari had collapsed finally into a chair.

Efa waited, listening near the door. Still the young man made weak attempts to protect himself, whining of shortage of staff and holidays and asylum muddle for which he was not responsible. He was appealing to their mercy. And the truth came out: the monthly meeting of the asylum Board was due in a fortnight, and if this affair was not settled and hushed-up before then, he would be sacked.

Marged, rapid in trying to snatch the authority dwindling out of her mother, turned on him then. " And you deserve the sack. A fool like you in charge of the register! A patient you used to be in that asylum? "

Cadi, first-born, gave Marged a demolishing glance and said, " Him getting the sack won't pay for the funeral."

" The shop," said Gwynneth with satisfaction, " won't take our clothes back."

" Over three hundred pounds spent and gone! " their mother whispered. " A long funeral with six heavy wreaths. A big grave. The asylum will pay me back? "

The young man, pale around his nostrils, made effort to protest. " A man can be buried comfortable for forty pounds. It isn't the fault of the asylum if you've got five daughters and buried a man as if he was a Lord Mayor."

Cadi, sounding more than ever like her mother, said, " A strange man is in our grave. He must be got out. More expense! "

" Let him stay there," barked Marged to the first-born. " The only sweetheart he is that you will ever lay by."

" Thirty guineas for the coffin alone! " Ceinwen gave the young man a smile of plump malice.

From the door, Efa got in at last, " Perhaps the mason is working on the monument this very minute? "

Her mother looked up and moaned, " What, you haven't gone yet? Go on the bike at once! "

" The gentleman," Efa said, " can take me in his car: it will be faster."

" Yes, go," jeered Ceinwen, her eyes not missing anything,

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" and we will sit and judge what is to be done with your gentleman." As the young man hurried over to her beckoning sister, she went to brew a pot of tea.

The front door slammed. Mari lifted her black apron, covered her face with it, and howled in woe, " Oh, what is it I have done to deserve this? " But the old power was quite gone from the howl. When a despot falls the collapse is total.

She, Mari Evans of the high farming and business reputation, had been guilty of the greatest of sins: witless and unwary, she had been cheated of money. Only a year ago, Luc Watkins, farmer over at Ystrad, had declined into a mortal illness because, in his cups, he had been sold a defective cow at market, and by an Englishman, too. " What is it I have done? " she groaned. " A good-living woman I've been, and a hard worker."

Cadi fluffed up her bosom. " But a widow you are not, after all," she sang.

" You must start a law case," shouted Marged. " All of us will sit in public court with you. Go tomorrow to consult Vaughan the Lawyer."

Mari lowered her apron. In Wales mention of lawyers brings shivers to money-owners, for so often their shifty work is a fearsome gamble. Could she fight the huge asylum, kept by wily and important men of the country? " Lawyers? " she whimpered. " Six shilling and eightpence every time they open their mouths! "

" No doubt," Cadi said, giving Marged another demolishing glance, " the asylum lawyer would ask in court why you didn't look into the coffin to make sure the corpse was your husband."

Weak and wailing, she tried to justify her old guilt. " As he used to be I wanted to remember him always; a man sound and fresh, and still my loving John." She even tried to accuse her daughters: " You looked into the coffin, all of you! "

Her first-born declared, " So young I was when he hid himself from us up the elm tree that I couldn't remember him properly. But I mentioned he had shrunk and gone bald." She raised her voice threateningly: " Blaming *us*, are you? "

" People will say," Gwynneth hummed, " that a wife with no feelings you were, refusing to take a last look at him. Or a coward."

" It would come out in court," Cadi added, " that you never went to see him in seventeen years. The case printed in the papers! . . . No," she swept Marged aside, " *no taking it to court.*"

" If," blew Ceinwen, bringing in the teapot, " that young man isn't married or courting, Efa is intending to take advantage of him. Quick enough when she wants to be."

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" Judging by the hole in the heel of his sock," Gwynneth said, " married he is not."

" We must take into account," decided Cadi, just and fair, " that if it weren't for his mistake no new clothes we'd have got to show ourselves off to the world."

" Yes," Gwynneth agreed, " and now some day we can have the funeral of our proper father all over again."

" Perhaps Efa was right," admitted Ceinwen, pouring tea, " when she said the funeral will hatch good things. Young men in Miskin will know that we will bury them loving. So let us not worry over the expense."

Mari, ignored now, sank further into a stupor, though when Cadi handed her a cup of tea, she whimpered, " A curse is on me for neglecting him."

" In the old days," her first daughter said, " people would say that a witch was behind this black behaviour."

" A good witch," purred Gwynneth.

Yet, as is the way with women roused in excitement, nothing solid came out of their conference. The tea drunk, only Marged raised the point of what was to be done with the duffer from the asylum, but to this Ceinwen said, " Efa will have decided."

She was gone a long time. They had lit the oil lamp before she returned, the asylum young man, pale but looking a little more hopeful, behind her. From the top of the dresser her magpie flew to her shoulder as she sat the young man considerately in a chair.

" The monument? " whispered Mari, dwindled in the shawl she had asked for in her cold distress.

" The name of John Evans," Efa announced, " was cut on the column this morning. The mason said, ' Business is business, a monument is ordered, and deposit paid.' " Mari uttered a groan of final defeat, and her youngest daughter proceeded, " But there's a difference a man makes! Owen, here, had quite a to-do with the stubborn old mason, and a halfway bargain is struck. The centrepiece to be kept till required, but no marble steps, surround, or doves, as ordered, and no more money to be paid. Thanks to Owen being so fierce with him."

Owen, looking down his nose, muttered something no one could hear; plainly he was still in dread of the assembly.

Ceinwen, pursing her lips, said, " A long time you've been settling a bit of business like that! over five hours! "

" We went into the Red Lion for refreshment," Efa stated.

Marged said harshly, " The business of all the other expense is still to settle. Savings this asylum fellow has got? "

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" Even if it is only the price of a thirty-guinea coffin? " blew Ceinwen, fixing him with her fat brown eye.

Efa, stroking her magpie, which was pecking at her ear-lobe in jealous esteem, said, " Owen is willing to come and work on the farm for nothing on his day off every week; and for his holiday of a fortnight, starting next month. Helping us to stone the Melan fields, perhaps? "

" Ay," Owen spoke at last, and braced his bowed office clerk's shoulders, " ay."

" Free to work here for ever he'll be," jeered Ceinwen, half excited, half vexed by the suspicion that matrimony had been set going in the family at last, " if he gets the sack from the asylum."

" The sack Owen must not get," Efa said, complacent. " Soon as he marries, a little cottage he can take close to the asylum, and then every day I will be able to see our poor father, that has been neglected for seventeen years, though he has a wife and five daughters fit to travel and show love . . . Perhaps," she said, as her mother raised a slow and vanquished eye, " I can make him well again, so that he can can come back to you, safe and up on his two feet? "

★ ★ ★

## *KING OF STRING*

*One thing to which I cling*
*Like anything*
*Is string.*

*I save short pieces, long pieces,*
*Weak pieces, strong pieces,*
*Coarse stuff and fine stuff,*
*Cord stuff and twine stuff.*

*I pick it up, scoop it up,*
*Twist it up, loop it up,*
*Make balls of it, skeins of it,*
*Long, knotted chains of it.*

*Yes, string is my dish,*
*And, frankly, I wish,*
*When it's time to unwind it,*
*I could find it.*

RICHARD ARMOUR

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# *Bidding Fair*

**She was pretty as a picture with her honey-coloured hair**

by JAMES NORMAN

STEN COGGSWELL is an art-and-antiques man, perhaps the youngest and most promising in the business. He has a combination small-gallery-and-office in the upper Eighties, and last year he made enough to pay income tax running into four figures.

Most of this is accomplished by haunting New England, the Catskills, and the Deep South, attending auctions. He can judge antiques and attic-dimmed paintings to within a very few dollars of their value.

His knack for digging up unusual things is incredible. Now, take for example the lost Rembrandt he discovered and gambled away for his wife . . .

I'll begin with Hobbsburg, where it happened.

This Hobbsburg is a pleasant, well-treed town, not large, but filled with trim and substantial homes loosely moored like becalmed vessels around an antique white church whose spire thumbs the Pennsylvania sky like a lighthouse. It is in the church hall, facing onto the village green, that the annual Hobbsburg auction takes place.

You've probably read or heard about the auction. To auction fans, it is like a Cup Final, capping a long and exciting season. Much of its success, apart from the fact that a lot of notable families rifle their attics for things to sell there, rests on the personality of the church pastor, the Reverend E. D. Coors, a shrewd and witty auctioneer. All the commissions that he gets on auction sales go to the church, which makes for satisfied buyers and sellers.

Coggswell and I had come down a day early to look up a family named Poorter.

The year before, Sten had got a picture at the auction for ten dollars. The picture had been worthless, but the frame was an antique and had fetched a good price. Sten had traced the frame to the Poorters, and there was a possibility they had more of the same to sell.

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The Poorters had been in Hobbsburg since the beginning. There had been a Jan Poorter, several generations back, who had gallivanted around Europe and had eventually returned to Hobbsburg and completed the big twenty-room Poorter house, which he had soon stuffed with period pieces and baubles.

The present Poorters were but two: a brother and a sister. I took it for granted the woman was a spinster for she was known as Miss Gilda and she was the town librarian.

"She lives by herself in that monument," Coggswell explained while we drove from the inn, where we had left our luggage, to the Poorter address. "The house may provide good pickings. It's old, and she's emptying it out. Evidently she's putting her younger brother through an expensive school by selling off bits of furniture."

The Poorter place turned out to be a huge weathered frame castle set back in a lawn that had gone to seed. A rusted iron deer stood knee-deep in weeds beside the drive.

Coggswell rapped on the diamond-leaded glass door, and a moment later it was swung back by a wisp of a girl who had intriguing high cheekbones, and wore her honey-coloured hair tied up in an alert horse-tail. There was flour on her hands and a smudge of it on her chin.

"May I see Miss Poorter?" Coggswell asked.

The girl gave him a shy and serious smile. "I'm Gilda Poorter," she said.

Had I been calling alone, I would have been overwhelmed by Gilda Poorter. She was the kind of girl who makes an instant and happy impression on a man. With Sten Coggswell, it was otherwise. He was always formal and slightly distant towards women.

He introduced himself and me, then explained how he had bought a Poorter picture at the auction. "I'm hoping you have others," he said.

The girl hardly glanced at me. She stood in the doorway, her blue eyes wide and bright, her lips bent in a hesitant smile, as she gazed at Sten. I had seen other women look at him in this manner before.

Sten was young and slightly cadaverous, but in a not unattractive way. He bore the stamp of wealth and good breeding, plus something more. There was an air of the aloof intellectual about him.

Finally the girl pulled herself out of the spell with an embarrassed laugh. "Oh, the picture. Yes, I remember it."

"Do you have others?" Sten asked.

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How Coggswell gets inside a house remains a mystery to me. Apparently he has only to smile, and doors open. It happened here too.

Miss Poorter invited us in, showed us to the parlour, apologized because she had something in the oven, then excused herself prettily, saying, "I'll bring you some tea."

Sten scarcely noticed she had gone. He stood in the centre of the room, wheeling slowly and carefully eyeing the furnishings. A blue Maxfield Parrish print occupied one wall behind a comfortable Morris chair. There were several spindle rockers, a magnificent box-front desk, some bronze and marble statuary on tables, and several gloomy pictures on the other walls.

Sten nodded towards the box-front desk. "Good," he said dryly. "Very good."

He walked over to the Parrish print and frowned thoughtfully. He came to a mirror and fished a dime from his pocket, which he held against the glass to check its thickness. He came upon a stack of pictures carelessly piled on a leather sofa, and began lifting each one to examine it.

Suddenly he tapped one of them with his knuckles. "Feel that," he said abruptly.

I took the picture. It was a small landscape done in deep, almost dark greens and browns. It was quite heavy.

"On a copperplate," Sten murmured. He took out a steel tape and measured it carefully, then held it up at arm's length. "Dutch. Incredible!"

Suddenly he sat down, still holding the picture. "Lev," he said quickly, "go to the kitchen and delay her for a bit."

I met Miss Poorter in the hall. She was coming downstairs. She had changed her dress and was now wearing a fetching yellow frock, edged narrowly with black. The daub of flour had disappeared from her chin.

"Came to see if you needed help," I said. "The cups and things."

"How nice," she murmured. "Yes, you can carry."

The kitchen was a huge airy room, full of good odours that came from an old-fashioned range. I munched appreciatively on fresh-baked cookies and admired her as she set out a silver tray, arranged cups, and poured hot water over the tea nestling in an ivory bone-china teapot.

"Is Mr. Coggswell an antique collector?" the girl asked as she set a tea-cosy over the pot. "I mean, is he in it for fun?"

"No. He's not that rich. He's a buyer."

"And you?"

"I do his accounting."

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She looked at me, wide-eyed. "He seems so young to have an accountant."

"I'm useful," I said, "and I don't charge much."

"Oh, I didn't mean that," she said. "But usually when a man's just starting, his wife does those things. Isn't he married?"

Knowing Sten's attitude towards women, I thought I should warn her. "Coggswell is a bachelor," I said. "He's not a very available one. He takes his work seriously. Never goes to shows, never dances. He—" I had begun to chuckle, but I cut it short when I noticed how the girl's cheeks had reddened.

When we entered the parlour with the tea-tray, Coggswell was sitting where I had left him, and the picture was back on the sofa. He was staring at the Maxfield Parrish print, but his mind was somewhere else.

"Coggswell," I said, "have a cookie?"

He abruptly returned to the scene. He smiled distantly at Miss Poorter, saying, "You've some fine pieces here."

The girl's eyes turned a marvellous blue. "They were mostly my great-grandfather's," she murmured.

Her gaze stayed on Coggswell. I was quite sure she was no longer thinking of the furniture. She just stared at Sten, looking deeply. The utter quiet in the room was embarrassing.

Even Sten, with all his reserve and faint scholarly haughtiness, grew uneasy. He scowled at the picture on the opposite wall and said, annoyed, "Maxfield Parrish!"

It jarred Miss Poorter out of her deep dream. She gave an embarrassed laugh. "Do you like it?" she asked shyly.

"Parrish? Why, no," Sten replied.

She sighed with disappointment. Then she motioned towards the other pictures: those on the walls and the stack on the sofa. "Would you know if these are worth anything, Mr. Coggswell?"

Sten laid his teacup aside, rose, and began examining the pictures, almost as though he had not really noticed them before. Finally he shook his head. "There's not much," he said. "Some of the frames are nice."

The girl nodded. "That's what the Reverend Coors seems to think. He looked at them yesterday."

Sten gave her a professionally sympathetic smile. "The picture I bought last year, I bought for the frame," he said. "Sell the frames if you want, but not the pictures. The paintings probably possess a sentimental value greater than any market value."

He lifted the landscape from the stack on the couch and set it up so we could view it. "Look at this one," he continued.

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" Artistically, it's bad. Notice the proportions, the two trees and the cottage." He shook his head. " And note the colour values. Far too monochromatic."

The girl stared at the painting, and her tiny brows knit as though she was struggling to understand Sten's criticism.

Sten put the landscape face down on the pile again. " Market value? " he asked rhetorically, then gave a negative shrug. " For all its faults, I like the picture," he went on. " It reminds me of my uncle's farm, where I spent the summers when I was a boy. Surely you have some similar feelings about it? "

The girl shook her head and smiled up at him sweetly. " Would you like to have it? I mean as a gift? " she asked.

Sten smiled faintly and shook his head. " It's not that important," he replied indifferently. " But you shouldn't fling family heirlooms at every stranger. I'd much prefer it if you'd let me buy that box-front desk there."

She glanced towards the handsome desk and shook her head quickly. " Oh, I can't sell that. It was my mother's."

Sten looked disappointed. " It's an excellent one," he said. " I should think it might fetch three or four thousand."

I glanced obliquely at the girl, expecting to see her eyes open wide. Instead, she smiled at Sten most engagingly. " I know," she replied.

" You've had it valued? "

" The Reverend Coors told me."

When we left the big house, with that slip of a young girl rattling around in it like a loose bolt, Coggswell looked back across the weedy lawn.

" Charming girl," he murmured.

Such statements from Sten are surprising. Usually he concedes handsomeness, charm, and existence only to objects that are aged more than a century. I was also puzzled because he had walked out of the house without purchasing the picture or any of the furniture that had interested him.

" I'll agree about the girl as well as the furnishing," I commented. " Which are you buying? "

He smiled and said no more. We drove back to the green, stopping at the post office, where Sten went in to send a wire. When he returned, he let out an exclamation and scowled at a panelled station wagon that had pulled up a little distance ahead, outside the Hobbsburg Inn.

Two men were getting out: one, a thin, elderly, grey-haired man, and the other, a handsome diplomat of a man with a rounded front. The elderly man was Mr. Hamilton Dean,

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director of the Gaynor Museum. His companion was Henri Cresson, the noted fine-arts dealer. Both were avid private collectors.

Their presence in Hobbsburg annoyed Sten. I didn't fully realize why until, at supper, a telegram was delivered to him. He ripped open the yellow envelope quickly, glanced at the message, tossed it over to me, and hurried to the telephone booth in the lobby.

I read the message, and my eyes popped.

REMBRANDT PAINTED SEVERAL COPPER OVER ETCHPLATES NINE BY ELEVEN STOP BELIEVE ONE IN DRESDEN MUSEUM STOP POSSIBLY LOST SCAPE LUDWIG BAVARIA COLLECTION STOP LIKE DESCRIP STOP MURTAUGH

A Rembrandt in Hobbsburg! My thoughts jumped back to that little landscape thrown carelessly on the couch at the Poorter house. I felt dizzy. Professor Murtaugh was the greatest living authority on seventeenth-century Spanish and Dutch art.

Sten returned to the table, and I looked up excitedly. "Did you know it was a Rembrandt?"

He glanced around with caution. There were a few people in the dining-room, but at distant tables. "I suspected it might be," he replied.

"Because it was painted on copper?"

He shook his head. "Nonsense, Lev. A lot of painters brush on copper. The painting looked like a Rembrandt, or more likely, a good copy of something from his early period."

"A copy?" I felt let down.

"That's what someone would guess at first glance." Sten smiled. "But why should a copier work on expensive copper? Why not say it's a Rembrandt? Consider the size of the plate. And remember, Rembrandt went broke during his last years. He didn't have enough money to buy supplies. Why shouldn't he have used some of his old discarded etching-plates to paint on? Add to this the idea that Miss Poorter's great-grandfather was of Dutch extraction. He could have been interested in Dutch painting. He had visited Europe and brought things back."

"What's it worth?" I asked.

Sten's face took on a bland poker expression. "Worth? Perhaps a good deal more than you and I have, and more than we could raise together. However, it'll have to be authenticated and valued by a museum."

"Can you get Mr. Dean or Cresson to do it?"

"Those two?" Sten nodded thoughtfully. "They'd make a good stab. But they'd want it themselves."

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Remembering the telegram, I asked, "Who does it belong to? the Poorters, or this Ludwig Bavaria collection?"

"The Ludwig angle is no problem," Sten answered. "Professor Murtaugh was referring to Ludwig, King of Bavaria; a madman, but a remarkable collector and builder. I'm sure he sold the painting to raise money. Once he tried to sell Bavaria to the United States without letting his subjects in on it."

"Why didn't you take the picture when she offered it to you?" I asked. "You refused it. Now you might have trouble."

Sten shook his head confidently. "You're going to get it, Lev."

"Me?"

"There's a dance tonight in the church hall." He smiled. "I've just spoken to Miss Poorter. She's going. I want you to dance with her, Lev, and to hint strongly that I fell in love with the landscape. You offer to buy it. Say you want to give it to me for Christmas. Offer somewhere between twenty and fifty dollars."

"Maybe she'll give it to us."

"No. You've got to pay for it, and by cheque. I want a legal transaction."

I sat back, staring at him uncertainly. It didn't trouble me if Sten made a gulping profit selling an antique to a Wall Street broker, but in Miss Poorter's case, it didn't seem right.

"Is fifty bucks fair?" I asked pointedly. "Can't you let her in on it, then sell it for her, and take a commission? On a Rembrandt, it ought to be a comfortable commission."

Sten arched his brows with shocked mockery. "That's not the way things are done," he replied.

Even though most of the visitors to Hobbsburg, coming from other parts of the country, would not arrive until morning, the dance drew its own crowd.

The village green and the grounds around the tall spired church were gaily illuminated by Japanese lanterns that swayed among the trees. From the windows and doorway of the church hall, fiddle and accordion music poured out upon the bland Indian-summer evening.

"There's the Reverend," Sten said, pointing out a ruddy, boxer-built man who was greeting people on the steps near the doorway. Except for his clerical black and dog-collar, he could have been taken for a shrewd, driving, bandy-legged Yankee farmer.

The pastor smiled, waving us inside. "Quadrille being made up," he said cheerfully.

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As we entered the brightly lighted place, the caller for the night was announcing the first set. I saw Miss Poorter, but before we could get near her, someone swung her into the set.

Music spiralled dizzily through the room, and the dance was a breathless one. The set was loaded with townspeople, girls and boys from as far as Lynville. Of all the girls, Gilda Poorter made the loveliest figure. She was dolled up in a long gingham gown that swirled, and her waist seemed so small a napkin-ring would have looked ungainly around it.

"Effective. Effective, indeed," Sten observed. He watched her with an odd fascination.

The set ended, and together we hurried through the crowd to the refreshment table, where Miss Poorter waited with a breathless and flushed delight. She smiled happily at Sten. "I'm so glad you could come," she said. "It's such fun."

Another dance began, and I claimed her. For an instant she hesitated, looking at Sten expectantly. Then I whirled her away into the waltz.

"Doesn't Mr. Coggswell dance?" she asked.

"He's a little shy," I said, laughing.

"I didn't get that impression. Is he, really?"

"Didn't you notice it this afternoon?"

She shook her head and smiled.

"Remember the landscape he lectured on?" I asked.

"His uncle's farm?"

"That one." I nodded sagely. "Well, Coggswell fell for it, but he was too shy to admit how much he liked it."

"How silly." She gazed towards Sten with sympathy.

"I've been wondering," I said, "if you'd sell me that picture. He admired it so much, I'd like to give it to him for Christmas."

She gave me a sudden distressed look. "Oh, I'm sorry," she told me, "but it's too late. I'd been planning to put those pictures I had on the couch up for auction. I sent them to the Reverend Coors this afternoon after you left."

"You're going to auction them? The landscape?" I almost stood still.

She nodded thoughtfully.

"Can't you get them back?" I asked.

"No. I can't do that. But you can bid on the pictures. Mr. Coggswell said they aren't worth much."

I felt completely confused, and I was relieved when someone tapped my shoulder. A boy in a checked shirt whirled her lightly out of my arms, and, half dazed, I stumbled off the floor to meet Sten.

"She no longer has it!" I blurted out.

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Sten abruptly stiffened. "She's sold it? Who bought it? Cresson?"

"No. It's going to be auctioned." I explained all she had told me.

Sten frowned, then shrugged, saying, "Well, perhaps it'll work out."

"But if it's on the block," I said, "won't Dean or Cresson or someone else recognize it?"

He made a vague motion with his hand. "A gamble," he murmured. "But there's a psychological factor. The auction is a sort of busman's holiday for Dean and Cresson. They come here for American antiques. Their attention is set on antiques. They may not be too alert about pictures that aren't American primitives."

The boy in the checked shirt escorted Miss Poorter back to us. Gilda Poorter's face was flushed from the dancing, and she stood before Sten, looking for all the world like one of those pretty, slim-waisted gingham things the old-time cavalry officers were wont to help down from dusty Concord coaches.

With an embarrassed smile, she gazed at Sten and, holding her breath, asked, "Will you dance, Mr. Coggswell?"

Sten's mouth bent slightly, as if he were about to give his usual clipped no. I felt sorry for him. All through college, he had never gone in for dances. I was sure he didn't know how to dance. But it's one thing to parry off a woman at a cocktail gathering in Manhattan, who really doesn't give a hoot if you dance or not, and it's another to do it to someone who looks at you the way Miss Poorter gazed at Sten.

The music had struck up an old-fashioned waltz of remarkable energy. Suddenly Sten bowed to the girl.

In a moment, they were on the floor, and what occurred there was a revelation.

Sten whirled Miss Poorter with a startling elegance and ease. He roved several times rapidly to the right, reversed the figure to the left, then gave an inventive whirl that sent the girl's skirt billowing. He coursed down the centre of the floor, swooping and gliding.

Even the musicians faltered for a second, surprised by his steps. Other couples stood aside to watch.

After this, no one else dared dance with Miss Poorter, and when I left at midnight, Sten was still at it. It was as though he were wound up by the starry look in the girl's blue eyes.

At three o'clock, I woke. The desk lamp was on, and Sten's bed still hadn't been turned back. Sten was pacing the floor

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in his stockinged feet. It didn't register at first, but a half-hour later I turned over again. He was still walking. I peered up drowsily. "What's wrong? You worried about the auction?"

He sat on the edge of the bed and nodded silently.

"Afraid someone will recognize the Rembrandt?" I asked.

"No."

There was a distressed expression upon his normally composed face. He looked utterly gaunt, and he gave me a wry, humourless smile, saying, "I don't know if I want her picture."

I sat up abruptly. "You're kidding?"

But I knew he wasn't. Something had happened between Sten and the girl. It showed all over him. Usually, where women are concerned, no matter how lovely or fetching they are, Sten just tinkles faintly like a tall iced drink and the surface frost never melts. Now he looked like a bucket of slush.

"You have fallen for her?" I said.

He gave me an odd, witless grin.

"Did you tell her about the Rembrandt?" I asked.

"How can I?" he sighed. "If I tell her, what'll she think of me? She's smart. She'll know I tried to do her out of it."

"Are you serious?"

"I'm going to marry her. I haven't asked her, but I shall."

There was an interval of silence as we both brooded. "Look," I said at last. "Go to the auction. Win the picture. Give it to her, then confess like a good scoundrel."

"She'll refuse to take it. You know—Poorter pride, old family, no charity."

"Then skip the auction."

He shook his head. "And let someone else get the Rembrandt? Let them get it for beans? Gilda needs the money. It's hers."

I leaned forward. So it was Gilda now. Not Miss Poorter. "What do you want me to do?" I asked.

His hand made some loose, restless embellishments in the air. Then he rose, and with a kind of tottering despair, staggered from the room. I waited for a while, but he didn't come back, not even for his shoes.

The next time I woke, it was noon. Sten wasn't in bed, nor did his bed show signs of having been used. His shoes were gone, so he must have come back at some time. When I went downstairs, there was no message for me at the desk.

"He must be at the auction," the clerk said. "It has already started."

The Hobbsburg auction certainly draws people, and a moneyed crowd too. The streets were jammed with expensive cars. I had trouble shouldering into the church hall, and I had to stand.

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Up front, the Reverend Coors had an old rocker on the block, and the bidding for it was lively. The parson was good. He had the voice and the patter. I saw him boost the bidding on a primitive cherry-wood candlestick from a dollar to thirty-five. A Chippendale mirror went for eleven hundred. He chanted bids, badgered the slow ones, told stories, rumpled his hair, and swapped wisecracks, punch for punch.

Finally I spied Miss Poorter wedged in among the bystanders along the east wall. I worked my way there and touched her arm. "Where's Coggswell?" I asked.

"I haven't seen him. Isn't he here?"

"I can't find him. Did he call you this morning?"

She shook her head and looked at me questioningly. I glanced over the crowd again. There was no Sten. All at once I was afraid that he had gone out somewhere in the countryside to struggle with himself and had forgotten the hour.

I pulled the girl's arm. "You've got to pull your pictures out," I whispered. "One of them is valuable."

"But really—"

"Withdraw them," I insisted loudly.

A woman glared at me angrily. Then, as if from a great distance, the Reverend Coors's hammer banged, and his voice jarred me: "Here, ladies and gentlemen, in this fine collection of oil-paintings from the old Poorter home, a sensational offering—an authentic Rembrandt van Rijn!"

I whirled towards the voice. The parson was exhibiting the framed landscape to the audience. It was the Rembrandt. He placed it on an easel at his side.

"This morning," said the parson, "two art experts, who are present now, examined this important painting." He pointed his hammer towards Hamilton Dean and Henri Cresson, introducing them to the crowd. "Both experts," the parson went on, "agree this may be an especially valuable old master. Now, ladies and gentlemen, do I hear an offer of ten thousand dollars?"

Gilda Poorter gave a tiny gasp and started to raise her hand. I stopped her. "It's O.K.," I whispered hoarsely. "That's what I wanted you to know."

When the flutter of excited and surprised murmurs subsided in the hall, someone behind me offered ten thousand. Then, for some minutes, the bids swirled about us, crackling like a fanned fire. It began to slow down as it reached the thirty-thousand mark. The Reverend Coors ran the fingers of both hands through his hair dramatically. "Thirty," he shouted, "for an authentic Rembrandt! A pittance. Who'll offer me thirty-five?"

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"Thirty-five!" The voice that met the offer was Sten's. I craned my neck until I spied him buried in the crowd behind us. He looked lean and tired, yet his eyes had that impervious iciness they assumed when he was really working.

"Thirty-six thousand!" It was Henri Cresson.

"Thirty-seven!" Hamilton Dean upped the bid.

"Forty!" Sten covered them both. The crowd around Sten pressed him forward.

Gilda Poorter clutched my arm, and her eyes were feverish with disbelief and shock. The bidding went up to forty-four thousand, and Cresson shook his head and finally dropped out. A tense hush had settled upon the crowd. The fur-flying give-and-take you get at auctions had given way to tense excitement.

The parson's voice boomed. "The young man offers forty-four thousand for this fine Rembrandt which once belonged to the King of Bavaria, our Hobbsburg Rembrandt. Do I hear forty-four thousand and five hundred?"

Mr. Dean shot Sten a challenging look and upped the bid. I was aware now that Sten must have told the parson about the Rembrandt and its connection with the Ludwig of Bavaria collection. But why was he bidding?

He was mad, I thought. He didn't have that kind of money, nor could he raise it.

There was a fixed smile on Sten's face when he upped Hamilton Dean's offer. It was as if he were ready to mortgage the stars. Mr. Dean looked back with irritation, then signalled the parson. "I'll go to forty-six thousand flat," he said. "That's my final offer."

Every head in the hall swivelled back towards Sten. He seemed unaware of it. He pursed his lips, stared blandly at Mr. Dean as though he were frisking him. Then he made an infinitesimal and crucial gesture with his head.

"It's the gentleman's," he said.

There was a commotion at my side. I turned just in time to catch Gilda Poorter as she fainted.

I had carried Miss Poorter to the lounge, where the parson's wife was taking care of her. Meanwhile, there was an interval in the auction so the people could file up and gaze at the Rembrandt.

Just as Sten hurried into the lounge, Miss Poorter stirred and sat up.

She stared at him with a pale, trembling anger. She seemed to have forgotten that, aside from the commission that went to the church, the Rembrandt had brought her a nice nest-egg.

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"You—you thief!" she cried at Sten. "You knew all the time. Sentimental attachment! Your uncle's farm! Really!"

Sten managed a smile laced with agony. "But I told the Reverend Coors— "

"Go away, please." She began to cry.

At this moment, the Reverend Coors entered the lounge. He was rubbing his hands and beaming happily. He hugged Gilda Poorter in a fatherly way. "Tears, indeed," he said. "You are a fortunate young lady."

He turned and pumped Sten's hand vigorously, saying, "Frankly, young man, after you advised me about the Rembrandt, I didn't expect you to bid on it."

The girl stopped crying. She stared at the two men, puzzled.

"Someone had to set a price on the thing," Sten said.

"Set a price?" the parson asked.

There was a sprightly expression lashed to Sten's face. "Naturally." He smiled. "Dean and Cresson are friends. They wouldn't bid against each other too long. Someone had to come in." He looked at the girl, adding sheepishly, "And push."

They were staring at each other. The girl's blue eyes had a distant chill, as though she was reminding and rebuking him for that scene in her parlour the day before. Sten knew it, and I had never seen him act so. There was none of the old Coggsweli haughtiness, the frosted drink. He gave her an almost hangdog look and muttered, "No. I never had an uncle who had a farm."

I was afraid he was going to turn away and leave, and that would be the end. But there was something about the Poorter pride that knew how far to go and when to bend.

Gilda Poorter let out a little troubled cry, exclaiming, "Oh Sten— " Then she was in his arms.

I felt the Reverend Coors tugging at my arm, urging me into the hall. "There are some more pictures," he said.

★ ★ ★

## *ANSWERS to A NIGHT AT THE OPERA*

*on page* 33

1. *a. Rigoletto, by Verdi b. Madame Butterfly, by Puccini c. Don Giovanni, by Mozart d. Carmen, by Bizet e. The Magic Flute, by Mozart*

2. *a. La Cenerentola, by Rossini (Cinderella) b. Tristan und Isolde, by Wagner c. Peter Grimes, by Benjamin Britten (The Borough) d. La Traviata, by Verdi (La Dame aux Camellias) e. Salome, by Richard Strauss*

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# EQUESTRIENNE

**To see a fine lady ride on a white horse**

*A ghost-girl-rider. And though, toil-tried,*
*He withers daily,*
*Time touches her not,*
*But she still rides gaily*
*In his rapt thought*
*On that shagged and shaly*
*Atlantic spot,*
*And as when first eyed*
*Draws rein and sings to the swing of the tide.*

THOMAS HARDY, *The Phantom Horsewoman*

## *Haute Ecole*

The flashing piebald snorted excitedly round the field. Above him sat the noble child, thin as famine, bony as a Roman, aquiline nose and domed white forehead, tufted loonily with her cotton hair. Velvet, with her great teeth and her parted lips, her eye sockets and the pale eyes in them, looked like a child model for a head of Death, an eager bold young Death. She was thinking of something far outside the field. She was thinking of horses, great horses, as she sat her horse.

Turning in a flash in the middle of the field she drove him on with her knees. They went at the wall together . . . She bent slightly and held him firm and steady, her hands buried in the flying mane firm on the stout muscles of his neck . . . She did not attempt to dictate to him. They cleared the wall together, wildly, ludicrously high, with savage effort and glory . . .

ENID BAGNOLD, *National Velvet*

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## *Heavy in the Saddle—*

*A louely Ladie rode him faire beside,*
*Vpon a lowly Asse more white then snow,*
*Yet she much whiter, but the same did hide*
*Vnder a vele that wimpled was full low,*
*And ouer all a blacke stole she did throw,*
*As one that inly mournd: so was she sad,*
*And heauie sat vpon her palfrey slow . . .*

EDMUND SPENSER, *The Faerie Queene*

## *—Light of Heart*

They rode, all three of them, with the two dogs, that afternoon, and Anquetil found himself happy and at ease in the society of the two young creatures. More than that: he felt himself exhilarated, as he seldom was, save in the anticipation of some new adventure.

. . . For them it was no more than a natural expression of exuberance, as they loosed their horses and tore, racing each other, up the valley, wildly waving their caps and shouting at one another as they raced neck-to-neck up the final lap between the banks of bracken. Side by side they sat their horses waiting for him to come up with them, a great view of fields and distant hills opening behind them,-but he slackened his pace into a trot, for he liked to look at them and thought that he should carry away for ever this image of the two sitting so gay and slender in the clearing of the bracken, with the English view behind them and their horses pawing the turf, and Sarah and Henry stretched panting on the ground.

V. SACKVILLE-WEST, *The Edwardians*

## *Enthralled*

*I met a lady in the meads*
*Full beautiful—a faery's child,*
*Her hair was long, her foot was light,*
*And her eyes were wild.*

*I set her on my pacing steed,*
*And nothing else saw all day long,*
*For sideways would she lean, and sing*
*A faery's song.*

JOHN KEATS,
*La Belle Dame sans Merci*

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## *Nag, Nag*

"There's no human being like her, that I've ever seen," said Josh, hissing through his teeth. "Hands like velvet, but strong like iron, and her seat—! Now look at you, jostling about on that saddle, first here, then there—we shall have a sore back to-night, that's one thing certain we shall." . . . The rain was pouring down by now. An icy trickle was feeling its way past my left shoulder, and my right boot was slowly filling with water, the pain in my back was like a knife. I felt that I couldn't bear another moment of this misery, and yet I knew I must bear another five miles, another forty minutes. Josh gave me scornful looks as my back bent more and more double; I could see that he was wondering how it was I could be my mother's child.

NANCY MITFORD, *The Pursuit of Love*

## *Mareback*

*But thy steed will hear no master,*
*Thy steed will bear no stick,*
*And woe to those that beat her,*
*And woe to those that kick!*
*For though her rider smite her,*
*As hard as he can hit,*
*And strive to turn her from the yard,*
*She stands in silence, pulling hard*
*Against the pulling bit.*

*And now commenced a struggle*
*Between that steed and rider,*
*For all the strength that he hath left*
*Doth not suffice to guide her.*
*Though Ulfrid and his sister*
*Have kindly stopped the way,*
*And all the crowd have cried aloud,*
*"We can't wait here all day!"*

LEWIS CARROLL, *Lays of Sorrow*

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# MAN TRAP

**His boots claw at the ice**
**—his fingers grab at air**

by WILBUR DANIEL STEELE

THIS has been a terrible winter for ice. Ice everywhere. What's a fisherman to do to make a living? Always this cursed ice.

Westering winds, ice on Truro shore. Southering winds, it crawls along and piles up on the flats at Beach Point. From the town, in the clear, cold weather, you can see it there across the bay, a gleaming ribbon, five miles long and a mile deep, waiting.

An east wind will do now. Any kind of a weather over the dunes from the ocean side is enough to push the creature adrift in the first tide, bring it snoring down and grinding down again, sweeping the moorings, raking the wharves, chock-a-block from the East End to the Cove. If you can't see it, you can hear it; can't hear it, you can smell it.

These Cape Cod Portuguese fellows, these flounder dredgers and dory trawlers, they can smell it. So can their women. Can you figure a woman half waking in the dead of night, turning her head on the pillow, trying to sleep again? No use. She sits up, paws for a match, blinks at the clock. Why? All the while she's sniffing, sniffing. Why? Of a sudden she shakes her husband by the shoulder.

"You, wake up, you! You hear me, Tony? Weather's went back to the east'rd. Git up! git up!"

No time for coffee. Swig of gin, perhaps. Pants, shirt, boots, rustle and thump and yawn in the sour lamplight. Damn the ice!

There are lights, all spontaneous, in half the kitchens in Portugee town. In one house it's: "Git out, Frankie!" in another: "Wake up, boys!" There's a fog in the lanes, and under it you'll hear men coming down, rattling their oilers, spitting in disgust. Damn ice! You'll hear dories grating on the frozen beach and the plaint of thole-pins.

Then you'll see lanterns out at the moorings, shrouded will-o'-the-wisps; you'll hear a clank of chains, a slap of cables, and presently, from everywhere, far and near, above the siren moan

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of Wood End, the put-put-put of engines. All for the beach; all for the railways, the lee of a dock, jetty, bulkhead; all in a hurry and the devil take the hindmost. Bump!

Bump and another bump! What's that astern? Block of ice. The advance guard, swift-cruising. Hark! Railroad Wharf down there; hear the piles groan. The devil's here, so quick.

Rotten, raw, mud-coloured dawn. The storekeepers are up, the plumbers and teamsters, the butchers, the bakers, the candlestick makers, all at their breakfasts, lucky men. These fishing fellows don't go home to their breakfasts; they squat along the ridge of the beach like misanthropic crows and study the ice. The whole harbour chock-a-block to the Point.

No knowing when the wind will haul now; no telling when the stuff will clear. A week maybe; maybe two weeks. Here it is mid March; time everybody was getting away south for the spring herring. What's a fisherman to do for a living? Let's all buy farms a thousand miles from salt. What a winter! Some folks say there was a year a hundred years ago when there was no summer at all.

Ice, ice, ice, ice, ice!

Two years ago Dummy Santos married a wife. Five years ago he left high school and went shares with another fellow in a power-ketch, dredging inshore winters and going south for the netting every spring. He used his head, kept his mouth shut —that's why he's called Dummy—and saved his money. Three years ago he bought a house in Saltdock Street, because the people had to sell, and two years ago he married Rosie Farquiera.

The fellows with whom Rosie used to run around were amazed. Rosie Farquiera! and that shrimp! Rosie liked to dance and go for car rides; she wore her hair short and knew how to use her eyes and never wanted the word for a spade. An "animal," the minister called her; a "heller," Father Deutra called her, publicly, at mass. So when in his sober, long-nosed, tight-mouthed way Dummy Santos hired a closed car one day and took Rosie to Father Deutra's altar, everybody in Portugee town was mystified.

Till lately they've continued to be mystified. It's seemed as though Dummy were the right kind of a husband for that girl after all. Though he never says anything, you can see he's proud of her, and he dresses her well. On her part Rosie has fooled them all by making him a good wife. She was all right, anyway; the whole trouble with Rosie was that she "never give a hang what nobody thought." That's bad in a small town.

She has fooled them all, till lately. Till within a month. It was too good to last. This can be said for Rosie, though: that

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fellow from the guano factory has turned more than one woman insane.

Rosie's beaux used to call Dummy a shrimp. He's not a shrimp, but he is a small-built man. He'd never get anywhere with his stature if he didn't keep his eyes open and his mouth shut and his head working. One thing about him is that he's a coward at heart. Offshore in any kind of breeze he would shake in his boots to see the combers coming up like hills if he looked at them; in a real gale, even in a lee, the howl of the wind through the rigging, or in a winter fog the growl of hidden ice, would put him in a panic if he once hearkened. He's often seasick, too, and he doesn't know how to swim.

Why then does he go to sea for a living? That's a question. Why, when he could make a go of a shop or a teaming ashore, with his money and his head, does he want to put up with that kind of a life, having to keep his eyes glued on his engine and let Frank do the steering when the waves run high, stuffing cotton waste in his ears when the rigging sings, and turning himself wrong side out over the gunwale almost every trip he makes? That's the question. If you know the answer you know more than I do, or anyone else in Portugee town.

" Seems like he does it to spite himself. He'll go any weather."

" You theenk he go south thees year? "

" Go *south*? Will a duck swim? You watch; he won't say nothing, but he'll get away south while the rest of 'em's still dreamin', if he has to cut a channel clean to hell 'n' gone; you watch the little shrimp."

" You theenk he *weel* go, though? I wouldn't eef I'm heem, thees year."

" Her, you mean? And Stinky Lorry? "

" I'd stay to home thees year eef I'm heem; that's all I say."

" *He* won't. A woman's one thing, and fish is another."

" He take a good deal stock in her, all the same."

" Yes, but if every man was to stay ashore to watch his woman—"

" Well, why don't he take a poke at thees fella? "

" Look at their sizes."

" Well, why don't he take a gaff? Why don't he take a gun? "

" Ain't got the spunk. All the spunk Dummy's got is in his head. If it was something he could do by settin' down and thinkin', now."

" Thinkeen'! Thinkeen'! "

" Yes, you can't pity a man like that, even if he is undersized."

He looks undersized indeed tonight, swinging his tiny axe against the great ice in the moonlit frame. One side of the frame is the Bay State Freezer dock; the opposite side, just as long and

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spider-legged and black, is Railroad Wharf. One end is the beach, an arc-light showing through from the front street, the big yellow globe over the side exit of the movies, and down lower on the beach the lantern-lit ports in the cuddy of the power-ketch, chocked up on its rollers, where Frank has just been in to see for the last time, at Dummy's behest, that nothing is forgotten. Groceries all right, gasolene all right, oil, grease, gear, twine, kindling, coal, water, gloves, socks, oilers, plug tobacco, castor oil, new flare-wicks, old magazines—everything tallied and right for the south. The other end of the frame is black water beyond the wharf-ends.

From that black open water to the ketch imprisoned on the beach it is roundly a hundred yards. The ice is rotten, but it is thick. The breeze still holds as gentle as a zephyr in the west, but the old easterly signals still burn on the pole on Town Hill.

It's a race. There are folks sitting on the docks to watch it. The harbour pack went out at sunset on this flaw of westering breeze, leaving only the ice that's stuck between the wharves, like mud in a rake. But it hasn't gone far. In this breathing space of clarity and moonlight you can see it hanging around, in two minds, outside Long Point, a glimmering streak without visible end. No, it hasn't gone far, and on Town Hill, Sam Works won't pull his easterly signals down.

"She'll be back before morning," says he. "We ain't shed of that ice yet, not by a dang sight. I'll give you fellows six hours at most before the wind backs up again."

Six hours. Give them four hours. Just four hours before the devil closes the channel around Long Point and comes piling in once more. No, the way the ten-foot cut is creeping beachward under the strokes of the three axes, give them but three good hours now. Three hours only, barring accident, and Dummy and Frank will be on their way to the fat fishing while the rest of the fleet is still dreaming ice-bound on the beach.

"Listen, though," says Frank, holding his axe. "There's somebody else got wise up to the west'rd. Hear 'em choppin'. Daisy Avellar's gang, I wouldn't wonder. They got a gang, though, ain't they?"

Frank's mother was Irish; he has blue eyes, and though he isn't much heavier than Dummy, he's a man who likes to fight. He looks at the lane of black water behind them, clogged with grey debris of ice, then at the distant gleam of the floe, then at the three little yellow eyes in the waiting cuddy ahead, then at his partner, hunched over his work, tight-lipped, thinking, thinking.

Then he glances at the broad, magnificent shoulders of Stinky Lorry, the volunteer, burying his axe-head with enormous,

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grunting, rhythmical blows in the punk on the farther edge of the channel. Then he spits on his hands and says, "We should worry, though."

"You should worry," says Stinky, "if you didn't have me to help you guys." Without missing a stroke Stinky glances across at the two with a curl of his handsome, beef-red lips.

It's true. Stinky, working alone on one side, crashing through with his iron and, from time to time, with his great boot, shoving the manageable cakes down and out of the way beneath the floe, keeps easy pace with the two fishermen working on the other.

He loves this. He loves to whirl his arms and sweat. There are many things to think of while he does it, simple things, apt to his simple mind. There's an elementary symbolism about this crashing through to the beached boat; had Stinky ever heard the tale of Beauty locked asleep in the wood of thorns, he would be bound to think of that. Kisses at the end.

Then there are lots of eyes on the wharves watching him, seeing how easily he holds those two little squirts even, understanding with wise grins how he is making a fool of Rosie's shrimp of a husband with every blow of his axe. They know what's up; they know, they know.

Stinky loves to be watched and admired. No man in town is so much admired. Percy White, the selectman, may think he is important, but who turns to watch him when he passes, as they do when Stinky goes down the street? Steve Small, the Bay State engineer, may imagine he is good-looking, that he dresses up to the hilt and has a lot to do with even respectable women, but in truth he's no match for Stinky Lorry.

Stinky smells. He works in the guano factory, where they turn spoilt fish into oil and fertilizer. The stench in that place is beyond belief, something so abominable that it cloys, an attar of putrefaction, a sediment in the air. You get used to it if you work there, but no matter how much you wash when you get home, the smell stays on you for others. You can put perfume all over your clothes; it makes no difference.

What's the odds? Stinky has made the discovery that a great many woman actually like it. Some women it seems to draw. He has seen women he was hugging, close their eyes, part their lips, dilate their nostrils, and seem to drink.

He doesn't understand it himself, but there must be something strange and strong and nice to them in that smell, after the plain grease and gurry of their husbands. Like a cave-man, perhaps, in the movies.

Thinking of the movies—when the movies are out there'll be more eyes on the docks to watch him swinging his axe like a toy

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in the epic moonlight and to wink with the knowledge of how, seeming so generous with his help, he is making a fool of that wise guy, that sawed-off smart Alec, Rosie's husband, every yard nearer they get to the imprisoned boat.

Stroke by showering stroke. Yard by slippery yard.

No, but thinking of the movies, he must remember. When the movies are out there's something else he must do. He promised her.

So he thinks his large, smooth, fortunate thoughts.

"Look at him," says Elmer Sparks, sitting on a salt box in the lee of the shed on the Bay State. "He's got a nerve."

"He sure has," says Brother Sam with a chuckle, "the big windbag! I was at Silva's store when Dummy and Frank come in this afternoon to buy a couple of axes. 'Goin' to make a stab at it?' says Silva. Dummy says nothin'. 'Never no tellin' what *we'll* do,' says Frank. Stinky's followed 'em in. 'If you're aimin' to make a break to get south,' says he to Dummy, 'I ain't got nothin' to do; I'll give you a hand.' What a nerve! Dummy says nothin' and stares at the floor, red's a beet. 'Stinky,' says Frank, 'I got half a mind to bust you one with this axe I got,' says he. Dummy's still starin' at the floor. 'Silva,' says he, 'give us another axe then, if Stinky's so kind to help.'"

Elmer spits over the side of the dock. "And they call that a man, that'll take and eat dirt. Look at the shrimp."

In the downpour of the moon, girt by the empty water, the dirty ice, the gaunt, black wharves, the silhouette of the town sprawled against its own lights, the come-and-go of beacons, the pearly ribbon of fog making up so soon beyond High Land in the east—in this spaciousness of the night, Dummy is less than a shrimp: he's an inchworm.

He looks like an inchworm when he humps his back and brings his axe down. He chops with all his might, too, but he doesn't love it. He thinks, too, but his thoughts are neither smooth nor fortunate.

If I was a man, he thinks, I'd bust him one with this axe I got.

People imagine that Dummy Santos can think more easily than most; they have somehow got the idea that his head works like a machine, taking in problems at one end and turning out answers at the other. No person would spend so much of his time thinking if it were at all hard for him. This is not true. Since he was a baby everything has been hard going for Dummy—marbles, hop-scotch, reading, thinking—work, all of them.

It's not that there aren't thoughts enough. There are too many.

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I've got to hurry. That ice is coming back too quick for us, chock-a-block. Bang with the axe! Harder! Bang! Faster!

Why, though? Name of goodness, what am I doing? Not faster—*slower*! *slower*, you numb fool! You crazy? To go off south and leave Rosie alone! Rosie's not herself. Not since that fellow came around—swaggering around Saltdock Street—the hound! The woman-hound! Slower, you fool! No, better than that, take some ammonia, same as they do in the storages, and go back and freeze it up, every foot, every last fathom of the cut; seal and congeal it up again, tight, tighter'n a drum!

Bang, though! Faster! There's Town Hall clock: one, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight, nine. Faster, you weak fool! Crash! Splinter! Sweat and swing! Want to make a living? Sweat blood, then! Bang!

I have to chop between my feet, he thinks; that's the only way to get leverage. One foot's on the ice that goes. When it goes my other boot slips. The black water sucks up in a spout. It scares me. If I went in sideways and plunged down under the ice and came up with my head against it—bumping, suffocating—drowning liked a caged rat in the blind cold! Every time that ice goes from under, I slip. What if one of these times—

Why do I have to be so scared? That I won't make a living? Won't get ahead? Ahead of everybody else?

Why do I have to be scared of everything? Of leaving Rosie? My beautiful Rosie? I trust Rosie. I do not. Not for a second I don't trust her; not with that big, strong, lusty, red-mouthed Stinky Lorry, that woman-grabber there. If I was a man now—half a man now—I'd—I'd—but then they'd all grab me. They'd hand me over to the sheriff. Send me to the electric chair up in Charlestown. I'm scared of that.

Look at him there. The big windbag! the big bull!

I wish I was like him. I wish I *was* him. I wish I was heavy in place of light, reckless in place of careful, admired and large-mannered in place of two-minded and mean. Why couldn't I have been born him? Then I shouldn't be going off south with a worry—

*Am* I though? No, I ain't. I ain't going! I won't! I won't!

Look, though! The wind's gone slack. She's making up in the east already. Sam Works was right. Hurry! Bang! Faster! Bang!

"Think we'll make it, Frank?"

Frank weighs his axe and wipes a sleeve across his face. He estimates all the factors, as a man might read the figures of a problem on a blackboard—the measureless blackboard of the March night.

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"We come fast," he says, glancing back along the cluttered canal. "Though the breeze has rotted out and that means a shift pretty quick. Daisy's gang has quit; he's give up. I don't know, though. Give us some luck, though. We ain't got a great ways to go now. We'll make it, I guess."

"You'd make it in a pig's eye, though," says Stinky from beyond, "if 'twa'n't for me helpin' you." His axe flashes bi-coloured between the arc and the moon; a chunk of ice gives under his foot; he strikes it with his heel and sends it plunging and splashing, and laughs, showing his teeth. He sinks the iron in the line ahead. "In a pig's eye you would."

Frank studies him, hawks in his throat, spits on his hands. He raises his axe and lowers it again and studies Dummy. His eyes are narrow with the impatience of a manly soul. "You goin' to see your woman again before you go, Dummy? Or have you?"

Dummy broods at the ice. "I don't know. Maybe if she comes down. She's at the movies."

Once more Frank flings up his axe, and once more arrests it. He can't fathom a man like Dummy, and it's too much for him to hold. "Say, look-a-here! Are you goin' south on *my* account? Tell me."

Dummy says nothing. He broods at the water.

"But, say, look-a-here, fellah!" Frank corners an eye at Stinky and drops his voice. "What you aimin' to do about it? What you goin' to do?"

Dummy says nothing. He reddens, eats the insides of his lips, stares at the water. The black, black water, clogged with livid, livid chunks. What am I going to do? His thoughts echo: what am I going to do?

The cold black water! The secret water running back under the floe, floored seven feet deep with tin cans and bottles, and roofed over with ice, through which a man, if he were trapped down there, might see the dim blue phantom of the moonlight shining—while with his face against it he held his breath—till his eyes burst and his lips caved in! What am I going to do? what, what, what am I going to do?

"What are you going to do?" Frank persists in his ugly whisper.

"Take it easy, you guys," Stinky calls across. "Why don't you set down and have a smoke and leave me do it all? I don't cost you a cent, and I like it."

Slice goes his axe. Crash! Grunt and swing and crash!

The movies are out. Under the yellow globe, between the side exit and the bakery, there is a jostle of men, women, and children.

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Some of the men, even a few of the women, being of a fishing race, observing on the moonlit stage beneath them this drama as full of animation, suspense, and sardonic comedy as any film, trail out on the Bay State to mingle and exchange questions with those already there.

" How was the pi'tures? "

" Not too bad; least, I liked it. Didn't you, Hen? Had me fooled, the way it turned out in the end—that Mexican. But, say, how these fellows comin', out here? They goin' to make it, you think? "

" If Stinky's got the say of it they will, all right, all right. Look at him work, will you? Look at him sweat! Neighbourly, eh? "

" Huh-huh-huh! "

" Huh-huh-huh is right. Ho-ho-ho! Did you ever see the like? "

" He's a magnificent creature," says the doctor's wife to the new district nurse, both munching peanut toffee.

" Say, what's this now? Stinky quittin' on 'em? "

Stinky Lorry, having left his axe stuck deep in the ice, is striding deliberately towards the Bay State. Frank and Dummy leave off chopping, mystified. After a moment Frank calls, " Where you goin'? "

Stinky keeps on.

" Stinky, where you bound for? "

Stinky wheels and wags his head vigorously, making a sign over his lips for discretion. He cups a hand: " Can't you see there's ladies, you fools? "

A titter runs along the height of the dock and is suppressed. Stinky pursues his course into the shadow among the piles beneath the wharf. He picks his way through the leafless forest, lengthwise of it, beachward, and, come to the rising, steps out on the farther side.

Here there's a nook formed by the flank of the freezer, the rear of a grocery, and a twine shed.

" You here? " he demands at large.

Rosie comes towards him, edging down along the lee of the concrete foundation of the freezer, a clandestine shade, an obscure, long plaid sports coat, a nervous turban, plums and checkerberries, and a dim, pale face with lips that look black in the gloom.

" Was the pi'tures good, girlie? " Stinky lets an arm fall about her shoulders. " Enjoy yourself? "

Her shoulders crowd up against his arm with a greedy pressure.

" They goin' to get off, Albert? They goin' to make it? Tell me quick! "

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Her words fall over each other; her dilated eyes search his. It is at moments like this that you will see Stinky Lorry at his best. "Gentle, dearie! Keep your shirt on. You ain't told me yet was the pi'tures good?"

"You devil, you imagine I *seen* the pictures? You devil, you! Tell me, Al! Oh Al! for heaven's sake, don't keep me waitin'. They goin' to make it? *Is* he goin' to get away?" Sliding one hand around his neck, under the collar of his mackinaw, she pinches the tendons together at the back with a sudden cruelty. "He *ain't*! I can tell. That's why you don't say nothin'. Now that shrimp's goin to be hangin' round at home for another—"

Stinky yawns a grin. "You wouldn't mind that. You got along quite a spell with Dummy hangin' round the—"

"Not since I seen you, you devil, you; you great big, overgrown, good-lookin' kid, you. I ain't the same's I was. I never love a man before. I ain't—I can't—don't—can't you *see*?"

"Say! You ain't anxious or nuthin', are you? Well, then, what if I was to tell you, no doubt of it, he'll get away all right tonight—inside an hour, maybe? Hey, there! Well, all right, leave go of me and I'll give you one kiss. You like that?"

Sometimes in his mind, which is like a Greek god's in its seamless simplicity, Stinky has moments of sober wonder how he ever came to be given this power of turning women insane. It's just that some men are born that way.

There goes Town Hall: one, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight, nine, ten.

Beyond Truro shore, beyond the great curving sandwall, the moonlit fog is no longer a ribbon, but a battlement with towers. Dislodged by the west wind, the towers topple inward on the dunes; High Land Light vanishes; the siren begins to moan. The easterly rallies its forces, under cover, on the ocean.

In the bay, outside the wide jaws of the harbour, the white wanderer is ill at ease. Now ice swims north on the gradual slide of the tide. Now it hesitates, touched by a ripple of irresponsible air, a mouse of a breeze at play while the cats of the east and the west are away. Now it whimpers and sighs through all its five or six square miles of nervous fabric; it complains with a million crystal clinks, a million tiny watery collisions. Rifts open like black wounds and heal again.

It has gone none to the east, none to the west; it is still in two minds, like the sky. In one quarter of the sky mount the silver pinnacles of the fog; in another the clear silver pinnacles of northern lights stream high, stream low.

Sam Works has come down from Town Hill. Standing by the

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chocked-up ketch, he says: " You boys've done well. You got a good hour clear yet before that ice is apt to close the Point " Sam knows weather.

Stinky leans on his axe-haft and wipes his face. He looks back admiringly over the finished channel.

" Thanks to me," he says.

" Do I leave her run? " Frank asks. Dummy nods. Frank swings at the master chock, one, two, three heavy blows. The wedge goes flying.

" She starts, she moves," intones the doctor's wife to the new nurse, over on the wharf, " she seems to feel—"

The high-sided forty-two-foot hull descends with a slipshod lurch, ungracefully, gouging sand and wallowing down amongst the floating chunks. The water fountains out on either side and drains back again, leaving two large scallops of shine on the floe. That's done.

There's Dummy staring at it. He looks like a dummy for certain. His eyes are big; his mouth is little, pinched, and dry.

What am I going to do?

He sees Frank jump, catch the gunwale, and with a monkey-wriggle get aboard.

*What am I going to do?*

The time has come to think. No, the time to think was a month ago. At the very last it was hours ago, before that boat came there.

How did that boat come there, stocked for the south, riding in that crack in the blue-white floor? How did that crack come there, straight as a ruler from the wharf-ends?

Well, this is how it came there. All the distance from the wharf-ends it ate its own way with a ravenous, irresistible speed, pushing before it across the treacherous ice Dummy and Stinky and Frank—herding them willy-nilly—giving them no time to think—driving them like helpless blind ones, stride by stride, chop by chop, before its blind, worming, greedy snout.

Dummy feels like an actor come to the first night without yet once looking at his lines. In the cold air, from his bloodless face, sweat oozes. He stands there like a stick and opens his mouth.

" Hand me out them boat-hooks from under the rail, Frank."

His mouth falls open again. " You take one of these boat-hooks, Stinky, and while Frank limbers the engine you and me'll go clean out some of them extra chunks, farther end."

" That's right," Stinky agrees with contented malice. " My labour don't cost you nothin', does it, Dummy? "

Dummy looks at his boots, his face going red. " Not a cent," says he.

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So they go, leaving the shore, the boat, and the people behind them, walking one on either bank, their boat-hooks over their shoulders like the pikes of medieval men-at-arms. Not unmurderous arms, either, these implements, shod at the ends of their ten-foot stocks with twin iron barbs, one coming, one going. So they march, the little man and the big one.

In place of a hundred yards it's a hundred miles. Plod, plod, plod.

Yet it's not far enough to give a man time to think.

The irony of it. Dummy Santos, the thinker! The fellow notorious for being so handy with his brain! Plod, plod. The brain is as dead as the feet.

The whole thing is that your brain works hardest unbeknownst: you'll never realize that you've been thinking a thing out till the business is done and the answer jumps at you. The fearful answer, sometimes.

That water. Look at it, inky-black and numb-cold. Look at the ice floating in it and the ice-lips along the sides to let the moon through but no breath. Look, you fool!

Oh Rosie! If I was a man! if I was half a man! if I had anything against the pitiless world except my head!

Rosie would be all right if this fellow would leave her be. This big windbag. Rosie's not herself, that's all. Dear, beautiful, good Rosie!

Look back at the shore, though, so far; look up at the wharves, so high; look down again at the water in this madcap cut, inky-black between the cakes and paralysing cold.

"Here's one should go," says Dummy, halting abreast of a cake the size of a dining table. "Here's one should go," he repeats, staring down at the floater, his face as pale as the dead, his tongue moistening his lip. "Here's one should—should—g-go."

"Well," says Stinky, fetched up at picturesque ease on the farther rim, "it's on your side, ain't it?" His voice is full of gusty sarcasm. "You want I should swim over?"

Dummy takes his hook and jabs at the cake. There is something comically fumbling about the way he goes at it. He picks at the thing; the pole seems too heavy for him; a man could do more damage with a table fork.

"What's ailin' you, Dummy?" Stinky puts his head to one side, as a cock might study the wavings of some new-fangled green-blue grub. "That's no way. Put your heft onto it. Heave one corner down in under the ice and give it a shove in back. That's the way!"

Dummy gingers his toes nearer to the brink, heaves his pole

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perpendicular, and jabs down at a corner of the water-logged cake. He puts his weight on it. He makes a big effort, sucking in breath to swell his cheeks.

Bungling. Inept and luckless. The rotten corner gives way. His boots claw at the ice, but rubber boots aren't claws. His fingers grab at air, but fingers aren't wings. Wharves swoop; the moon whirls up the sky. The water comes up in a black fountain, washes the lip of the floe where he stood but now, subsides, leaving a scallop of shine, and all the little ice fragments bob and clink.

It is amazing how much can happen in twenty seconds.

The wharves screech, the shore yells.

"Was it Stinky?"

"Naw, that's Stinky there; ain't you got no eyes?"

"He can't swim, Dummy can't!"

"Can't swim!"

"I think he hit his head, goin' down!"

"He's gone! Gone!"

"Jump, you! Git out o' my way, then; leave me jump off this dock!"

"There goes Frank runnin'!"

Frank yells as he runs. "Hey! hey! hey! hey! hey!"

The doctor's wife sits down and clamps her hands to her cheeks.

"Stinky!" everybody's screeching. "What the—"

"Stinky! Stinky! For heaven's sake!"

Jump from the wharves; go on! Leap from the shore! Run! Sprint!

Frank's voice sounds falsetto: "Stinky! Stinky!"

Call it twenty seconds. Twenty minutes it seems to Stinky Lorry. He feels as big and hollow as a house, left suddenly all alone out there in the cruel, brilliant, public moonlight on the ice.

He can't think. But, then, Stinky never could think. He's hypnotized. The gulf at his feet is full of too many moons: every little floating ice splinter has a moon in it, and all weaving different ways on the water rings, pirouetting, colliding, so many fire-threads.

He's hypnotized. A bubble appears over at the other edge with a moon of its own in its crystal chamber. Two ice slivers pounce upon it and it's gone.

Just as Dummy is gone.

Where's Dummy gone?

Stinky gives a gasp. Squatting down on his hams, he grabs his boat-hook in both hands near the end and begins to probe the deep water. With powerful wild sweeps, knocking the debris

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about in dissolving arabesques of foam, he lunges. He sweeps east, sweeps west, wringing his wrist tendons, stirring in submarine circles. Stirring. Stirring. Sweating big cold beads and stirring.

Now the soul of Stinky rebels. Indignation, self-pity overwhelm him. To have to squat here, stirring.

Why did fortune have to play its darling a trick like this? Why did worthless Dummy have to choose this public instant for his silly, awkward doom? It's an outrage.

To have to squat here on his hams in the spotlight of the moon, in the eye of the town, his name whistling on a hundred lips—squat here like an old woman, stirring, stirring!

"Stinky!" "Stinky!" "Stinky!"

Like an old woman stirring mush! What a note!

"Lorry!" Their voices louden in his ears. They'll never forget this.

Thud, thud, thud! Their footfalls make the ice shiver, nearer, nearer. They'll never forget this, never. Like an old woman stirring mush!

Hold, though! Wait a second! Glory be! The boat-hook catches. The hidden barbs grasp something. Away over there. At farthest arm's length. Over there under the lip of the farther side. Twist, man! haul! haul!

Swish! sag! The devil! it's come loose, the hook!

Grab again, man! Reach farther, man; grapple and grab! Look out for your balance, though, or in you'll go yourself. Into that icy, inky water.

Stinky is scared. A sudden terror dams his windpipe. Water is so awful with the moon on it. Grab! prod about! poke and prod!

"Stinky, for lord's sake!" They'll never forget the sight of him, squatting here and poling like an old woman with a broom straw testing a cake.

Stinky is scared to death. Twenty seconds are gone. That awful water! Once more the water makes a fountain and Stinky's gone beneath it.

Oh, he's scared, no doubt of that. When they haul him out, with his fist clamped in Dummy's hair, you can see his eyes turned up, all whites, from the terror that's under the ice.

They sprawl on the floe, he and Dummy, dragged back from the brink.

"Stand back!" cries someone.

"Stinky!" cries another. "Look up! Get your bearin's. Take a swig of this, old man!"

The gin burns down into his stomach, burns up into his brain.

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All over. I've done it. I pulled it off. And I'm safe, all right!

Stinky's on his feet, at his height, streaming puddles, tossing the wet mane of his brow with a fling of his great glistening head. He looks down at the sodden sprawl of Dummy. Frank's going to pick him up; so is Sam Works; without a word Stinky brushes them both aside and heaves the little fellow up in his big-sopping arms and sets off striding shoreward.

That's a picture for you.

"I bet they give him a metal."

"Give him the Carn'gie metal, I bet."

"Dummy drownded, you think?"

At the rise of the beach Sam Works takes a hand. He used to be captain at the coast-guard.

"Roll him over a barrel. Roll the water out of him."

They pry him out of Stinky's arms and roll him over a barrel from the freezer. Stinky stands there in a shiver.

"Another swig, Stinky! All you want this time, boy!"

"There's no water into him," Sam announces. "Must've held his breath good. Heart's beatin'. Scared fainted, that's all. Get him home."

Stinky pushes them away. He saved the lad; he'll carry him.

Out in the street, under the drugstore light, the doctor's wife insists on holding him up and wagging one of his burdened hands, saying: "That was a truly valiant act, Mr. Lorry. Thank you." The new nurse with her gives him a nod and a serious smile, looking straight into his eyes. "Tonight I have seen a hero."

She's not a bad-looker, this new nurse. Not bad, not bad.

Stinky thought he knew all the women and girls in town, but there are lots out tonight, some in wrappers or raincoats with their ankles showing, that he never saw before. And some that would never look at him now marching through the criss-cross lights, with startled admiring eyes. Who said there weren't fish in the sea? And that new nurse! Dog!

Tramp, tramp, tramp. A multitude of feet. A multitude of murmurs.

"They'll give him a metal."

"Dived right in—never mind the ice!"

"I never had the hunch 'twas in him. If it come to a pinch—"

Stinky himself, down in the dark bottom of his heart, used to have the same shadowy hunch. If it came to a pinch— What a miracle! what a comfort! what a relief! how grand not to have to claim you're a hero—seeing you *are*! what a rush of warm strength! Dummy's weight is nothing. Poor shrimp!

"Stinky carries him same's a baby."

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"Sure. But, say! say, did I see Dummy's eye open then?"

"You did not. How could you when he's scared fainted, the poor shrimp?"

"A lot o' good thinkin' done him that time, in under the ice!"

"If it wasn't for Stinky Lorry—"

Tramp, tramp, tramp to the westward; turn up Saltdock; tramp, tramp.

"There's his woman in the door."

"There's Rosie. Somebody must've told her. Say, though, listen; huh-huh-huh! 'Tain't much like what him and her expected—"

"Hush up, you dirty-mouth fool! As if this was any time—"

Stinky marches through the gate and up the steps. He and his loppy freight fill the lamplit doorway. Rosie retreats before them, her fists to her cheek, looking faint. Frank trails in. Sam Works guards the gate.

March into the kitchen smelling of oilcloth, blue flame, and onion fat.

March into the bedroom, smelling of slops and sleep. Lay him down on the bed. No, though; lay him on the floor till you get his wet things off.

"I'm going to faint," cries Rosie from the kitchen. "I feel so queer."

"Dang the woman! Here, Frank, you get his clo'es off him. Look-a-here, Rosie, don't faint."

"Close the door," says Dummy in a whisper when Stinky is gone.

Frank almost falls over backwards from his knees. He doubts his ears.

"Close the door, Frank." Dummy has an eye open, an eye that has looked into hell. If a man figures to make a living and keep a home in this world, though, he's got to look into some queer places. "Shut the door," he says, for the third time.

When Frank has obeyed and come back to haul at his boots, Dummy says in the same low tone: "Leave me be. You run down and get the engine limbered."

"Well, I'll be!" says Frank. Finally he steps out to the kitchen, where Stinky is propping Rosie up and looking queer.

"He'll come round all right," says Frank. He says the same to Sam and the people outside. "Might's well all go home."

Dummy lies there, toes up, eyes wide. He shakes and shivers. It seems as if he can never get up. He listens. It's the clock ticking. Tick, tick, tick, tick, counting off the precious seconds, the fatal minutes; ticking the wind up, ticking the ice in, ticking

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the Point shut, ticking the south away. Still he listens towards the kitchen door.

"Oh Al! oh Al!"

"*You* ain't faint. Shucks! Tell yourself you ain't faint, that's all. Now stand up, will you?"

"Oh Al! ain't this hell? Oh Al, look at me."

"Why for? Say, Rosie, now look-a-here, you don't seem to—"

"Oh Al!"

"You don't realize. You come awful near not havin' no husband tonight. If I didn't get him that second—if I didn't dive in under the ice that second, I never 'd've been able to save your husband's life. Same's I did."

"Oh Al!"

"I never think much about it at the time, but now it seems like folks are carryin' on, like I was some sort of a big hero—"

"Al-Albert! What's come over you? Al!"

"Yes, but—but—here's a chair; you best set down."

"Oh Al!"

The bedroom door opens, and there's her husband in his drowned clothes.

"What's happened?" he asks in a thick, weak voice, staring at Stinky. "How'd I come here? I was in under the ice, drowndin'. Who got me?"

Stinky hangs his head, and his face suffuses. That's something new under the sun.

"Your clo'es is wet, Stinky. 'Twa'n't *you* got me?"

"'Twas, too," says Rosie.

Stinky pouts his lips. "'Twa'n't nothin'," he grumbles.

"Nothin', eh? Nothin'? I *guess* not." Dummy gazes at the simple fellow with a look of awe. "Guess they won't think it's nothin' when they get round to givin' you one of these metals for heroes. Nothin', eh?"

"Huh!" Stinky wrings out a coat sleeve on the oilcloth. "I'd look great in a metal, I would. Won't catch me wearin' no metal around."

"Well," says Dummy, "I got to thank you for my life, that's all, and so has Rosie. From now on anything I got in the world is yourn for the askin', that's all. I got to beat it now, or I won't get south. Good-bye, Rosie, old girl. Good-bye—"

"Good-bye, Rosie," Stinky chimes in, edging towards the door.

"You ought to get dry," Rosie cries at him, half wail, half rage.

"Yeah, you ought to get dry," says Dummy, looking back agreeably from halfway out of the door.

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Stinky bites his lip and grins uneasily, edging out all the while.

"Guess we ain't neither of us so wet now as we was, in under the ice there, eh, Dummy? Well, Rosie, good-bye."

Side by side they tramp down Saltdock, their boots going squash, squash, with the water in them.

"I got to get a move on," says Dummy. "What if that ice has shut in, after all?" says he, and he begins to run.

"I'm froze," says Stinky, running too. Squash, squash, they get along, Dummy at his knotty calculations, Stinky at his large, smooth, fortunate ones.

"Stinky," says Dummy, cornering an eye up at the big trotter, "if you wouldn't mind, while I'm gone south, droppin' round now and then to see that Rosie's all safe, all right. Though her and me owe you so much already—"

"A man worries too much," says Stinky, swallowing his Adam's apple, his eyes rapt ahead. "Dummy, you don't happen to know where this new visitin' nurse is puttin' up, do you?"

"Never seen her," says Dummy. "Portugee woman?"

"Portugee? Guess *not*! Guess you *ain't* seen this girl! *Dog!*"

Well, that's over. That's done. There goes Town Hall: one, two, three . . eleven. Eleven! And you can smell the weather making in from the east.

Dummy is sitting on the cuddy roof, a big coat over his shoulders, elbow on knee, chin on fist, as the ketch comes clear of the last scattering ice beyond the Point and swings her head to the south.

"What you thinkin' of?" asks Frank from the wheel.

Thinking! thinking! How Dummy hates and despises thinking! If he could only get along in the world some other way, with some splendour, some heroism, some grace!

"I'm tryin' to think would we be more apt to run onto 'em off Jersey," he says, with a line up his forehead, "or down off the Virginia capes."

★ ***Veteran American writer Wilbur Daniel Steele was born in the same town as O. Henry, in Greensboro, North Carolina, and shares his mastery of the short story—has in fact won the O. Henry Award five times. For all that, he insists he is "pretty much the common or garden variety of person . . . always losing everything and having difficulty with income-tax returns. My main desire is to have the moon." While waiting for this, he works regular hours, turns out some six hundred words a day, and does his own typing.***

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# *Little Shoes of Saint Crispin*

**His wife said it was a wonderful surprise**

by JOHN SALT

THE shoes lay unnoticed at first in a narrow cobbled alley, flanked by blind-backed warehouses and walled on one side by the black brick and stone of the church of St. Brithnoth, in that part of South London which is hardly Bermondsey and not quite Camberwell.

They were bright red in colour and made from stiff new leather, but of an antique design with long curling toes and cross-garter fastenings, the kind that might have been worn by some nimble jester at the court of a Plantagenet king. Earlier that morning they had danced gaily from the top of the church tower, but then a gust of wind tore them from the mast-head and they plunged downward to lie forgotten upon the cobbles, where soon the city dust began to dim their cheerful glaze.

The first to notice them was a collector of note, one Eddie the Dip, who scarcely paused in his swift and slinking stride to scoop them up and tuck them inside his raincoat. So swiftly was the manœuvre accomplished that the young detective constable, who was following Eddie at a distance rather more than discreet, missed it altogether.

The Dip was a bright-eyed, vulpine little man of doubtful pedigree and uncertain moral standards, whose residence upon the Surrey shore was broken from time to time by unfeeling action on the part of the Tower Bridge magistrate. Eddie bore the law no grudge on that account, but it was a fact that such interruptions had a depressing effect upon his finances, and he tended to work rather harder at crime during his brief periods of liberty than he might have done, had the legal point of view been less intractable. It was a very vicious circle.

This morning, in addition to the shoes, he carried inside his raincoat a carefully waterproofed package that contained, within layers of tissue-paper and cotton wool, a number of very fine

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foreign watches. He had collected them a few hours earlier from a seafaring engineer of his acquaintance, who now waited in a Barking public house for Eddie to return with the negotiable proceeds of private enterprise.

The young policeman who followed Eddie knew nothing of the watches and no more did his superiors. He had been given the routine task of tailing the Dip by the station sergeant at Surrey Central who liked to be kept informed of the progress of the criminal inhabitants of his manor when they returned after lodging for a time at Crown expense. Although the sergeant would have considered it a betrayal, there was always the possibility that some might decide to go straight, and if they did not, it was helpful to be aware of the fact.

It was not yet evident to the legal mind that Eddie had turned over a new leaf, so the detective pursued him through a labyrinth of alleys which brought them at length to the Old Kent Road. A couple of right turns took them to a disused strip of black and oily canal beside which a tall old-fashioned public house, shored on each side by stout timber beams, stood gaunt and skeletal in the wilderness of a bombed site.

Eddie vanished through the saloon-bar door, and the detective allowed a full five minutes to elapse before following him inside.

The Dip sat at a table near the empty fireplace with another man. Two glasses of black beer stood between them on the table and the men were in earnest conversation.

The detective ordered a bitter and stood idly half turned at the bar, unable to hear the talk but keeping a close watch on the actions of his quarry.

The talk went on interminably but nothing else happened and the policeman grew restless. He moved farther along the counter until he was within earshot of the table, turned his back on it, and hoped.

The talk became quieter, but his sharp ears caught the sound of rustling paper, and he turned about suddenly to find Eddie with his hands before him on the table, trying half-heartedly to conceal an untidy package sprouting tissue and cotton wool. The detective detached himself from the bar, and strolled casually over to the table, standing just behind Eddie.

"Anything good there?" he inquired genially.

The Dip looked at him with deep disgust. "I don't know you," he said.

"Hubbard's the name, but don't mind it, we have lots of mutual friends," said the constable. "Now, aren't you going to show me what you have there?"

The second man rose from his seat and mentioned that he had

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an urgent appointment elsewhere. Hubbard laid a gentle hand on his shoulder and eased him back into the chair. " It will keep," he said. " Don't you want to see what Eddie has for you? "

The man bared his teeth at Hubbard but Eddie was more resigned. " The second perishing day out," he remarked. " Ain't you blokes got no 'eart at all? "

Hubbard's manner hardened. " Come along, that's enough. Open up," he commanded.

The Dip's hands fumbled at the rubber wrappings and prodded into the yielding package. Layer after layer of packing came away, and the table was littered before Eddie's fingers encountered the contents. Without comment, he spread them out on the table in a neat ellipse, three, six, nine, twelve prime sausages —pork, by the look of them.

Something unholy flared an instant within the soul of Eddie the Dip, but his face was wide open and innocent as he gazed up at Hubbard. " Bleeding coppers," he said, and did not embroider the comment.

His companion looked at him with hard suspicion and rose again to go. This time the policeman made no move to stop him. Hubbard was feeling most uncomfortable, his collar choked him and the tips of his ears flamed.

" Just routine," he mumbled at Eddie, " you never know what you may find," and fled incontinently from the bar, filled with unhappy forebodings concerning his report to the sergeant.

Torn between relief and rage, Eddie the Dip left the pub almost in Hubbard's footsteps and hardly ceased cursing during the hour it took him to reach Barking. His friend had left the rendezvous and returned to his ship, and this roused Eddie's suspicions the further. He found the man asleep in a cabin in the engineer's quarters and shook him violently to awake him.

" Slab-sided basket," he hissed. " Unwashed offspring of a chief stoker and a sea-cow, what the 'ighly decorated 'ell do you mean by working a switch on me? " and he slapped the sausages down upon the engineer's bare chest.

They were very cold and the man sat up with a start, banging his bullet-head against the low steel roof. He stretched out a long hairy arm and took Eddie by the shirt front, holding him suspended some six inches from the floor and shaking him gently back and forth while he unburdened his own mind.

The engineer implied with frightful calm that he was a peaceful man of respectable ancestry, but that when roused by injustice, he was liable to deeds of considerable violence, culminating at the very least in mutilation for life. This having been said, he

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allowed Eddie to collapse in a heap on the floor, and started to walk about over him while he collected his clothes and struggled into them.

Beaten but unbowed, the Dip continued to volcano curses from his recumbent position and was still adjectivally involved when the engineer picked him up and slung him carelessly into a chair. "Now," he said, "what's all this about?"

Eddie told him with indignation mounting to hysteria, and was quite unprepared for the sailor's reaction, which was violent to a degree. The engineer took the view that the whole story was a pack of lies. From where he sat it was plain that Eddie himself had made away with the watches, sold them at a no doubt handsome profit, and substituted the sausages to avoid having to share the proceeds of the sale.

He was astonished, said the engineer, at such sanguinary barefaced sauce and he proposed, short of any financial compensation, to knock the Dip's head off with a monkey-wrench which he happened to keep handy on his person.

He had in fact produced the weapon and was about to operate when the piteous denials of the chastened Eddie touched some softer chord. He relented, but only to the extent of a postponement. In twenty-four hours he wanted the watches back, or the money, or else.

In vain Eddie protested his innocence, the engineer was adamant. He twisted the string of sausages around the neck of his erstwhile friend, tied them in a knot, and speeded his departure with a well-placed kick and a promise of worse to follow.

Life had not served Eddie quite so hard before and he had a little cry on the way home. But the Dip was an acute character. He had begun to suspect that there was a pattern in the chain of events leading up to his present misfortune, and he applied himself seriously to find it. Accordingly he repacked the sausages as best he might within their disordered wrappings, and retired homewards to do some quiet thinking.

His wife, however, was not in the mood for peace and she greeted Eddie with harsh demands for the housekeeping money, or some reasonable facsimile of the same. On what, she inquired with heavy sarcasm, did he propose they should live? Hot air, perhaps? That was all he ever brought home these days, along with the mud on his boots just after she had scrubbed the floor.

Mrs. Eddie tended to go on in this strain for quite some time, and at last her husband threw the parcel of sausages at her with warm entreaties to cook them at once and stop her noise. Following a brief exchange of pleasantries, Eddie banged the door on

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her and settled himself to read the racing-sheet. There was no further sound from the kitchen.

This, being unusual, became disturbing. He rose from his chair and tiptoed to the door, opening it suddenly. His wife stood by the gas stove holding a frying-pan. Within it were some two dozen fine watches of foreign make and design.

She looked at Eddie with starry eyes in which the emotions of family pride and personal avarice were clearly mingled. "Eddie," she breathed, "what can you think of me going on like that about the housekeeping when you'd been out all morning working for me like this?"

The Dip peered into the pan, unable to believe his eyes.

His wife went on, "I just opened the parcel and emptied it into the pan without looking. I heard the clatter and there they were. I hope they aren't damaged. You really ought to have told me they were there, Eddie, though it was a wonderful surprise. How much will you get for them?"

Eddie ignored her and picked the watches one by one from the pan. They were real enough, smooth to the touch and solid. He examined the wrappings carefully. No sign of sausages. It was all quite beyond him, but at least he had the watches back, chance what had happened before.

With sudden new determination, he wrapped them up carefully again and stuffed them into a jacket pocket. His raincoat lay over the back of a chair and he slipped it on. Something fell from it as he did so: the shoes he had found in the morning. He stooped to examine them more closely.

It was the first time he had really looked at them since picking them up, and his wife peered over his shoulder, wondering at the fine workmanship and odd design. "Where'd you get them, Eddie?" she asked.

"I sang a song and they fell into me 'ands," her husband told her rudely, and on a sudden impulse thrust them once again inside his raincoat. As he did so he seemed to hear the sound of tinkling bells from far away, thin and faintly mocking.

"What about your dinner, Ed?" his wife asked him as he prepared to leave.

"Blank my dinner," said the Dip, and "Blank, blank," he added from the door. He was getting tired of being knocked about; it was time he got his own back on somebody.

His immediate plan of campaign was crystal clear. Back to the pub in Peckham, flog the watches, and away. The engineer could sing for his share, after the things he had said and done. Eddie moved swiftly but with caution, making sure that this time there was no Hubbard on his trail. From time to time also he

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squeezed the package in his pocket to ensure that the watches had undergone no further transformation. Their firm, thin outlines felt through the paper reassured him and his spirits rose as he neared the rendezvous.

The man he sought was again at the table by the fireplace, and Eddie sat himself down beside him without more ado.

"Wot you got this time, more bangers?" the fence asked sceptically.

Eddie shook his head, a sly look on his face. "Never on your life, these is tickers," he assured the man earnestly. "Worth a fair whack, I shouldn't wonder."

"Seeing's believing," returned the other. "I buy nothing by the pound. Let's have a perfunctory butcher's."

"That's right, Eddie, show us what you got," said another, deeper voice, and the Dip's flesh crawled as he recognized the menacing tones of the engineer. "What's it going to be?" the sailor drawled as he emerged from the shadows. "Tickers or bangers? Better say a little prayer, hadn't you, old pal, old pal?"

In point of fact Eddie was saying quite a number of little prayers, but he tried to bluff it out, clutching the anonymous parcel to his lean bosom. "I found 'em, Dick," he croaked. "They was there after all, wrapped in the paper. Don't know where the links came from, so 'elp me."

The engineer snorted. "You won't never make a percentage like that," he said roughly. "Come on, open up. Seeing's believing like my friend said."

Eddie laid the parcel on the table and began to untie it with trembling hands, but the engineer snatched it from him and thrust a finger inside. "Sausages again!" he bellowed. "I'll learn you, let me get my hands on you, you sawn-off, low-life river rat." He overturned the table in his fury.

While the big man stumbled wildly over the table legs, the Dip gained the door and pelted down the street. The engineer was soon in hot pursuit, madly brandishing monkey-wrench and sausages and gaining rapidly on the fugitive. Eddie twisted and doubled on his tracks through the lanes and alleys leading to the river, but could not shake off his pursuer. When he staggered into St. Brithnoth's lane, he knew he could go no farther.

At that moment the vicar emerged from a side door of the church and Eddie cannoned into him, collapsing at his feet.

His raincoat flew wide, and out tumbled the shoes. The vicar gave a sudden gasp and pounced upon them, at the same time trying to disengage himself from Eddie whose frantic grasp on the clergyman's legs threatened to drag the good man down.

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" Save me, save me," implored the Dip.

" Stuff and nonsense, there's no danger," said the vicar, and changed his mind abruptly as he caught sight of the engineer bearing down at a rate of knots, with monkey-wrench held high.

Constable Hubbard, now unhappily returned to the uniformed branch, appeared at the other end of the lane and began running to the scene of the struggle, tearing hastily at his whistle pocket, and quite failing to recognize that the thing he clutched and attempted to blow was in fact a banana.

Meanwhile the engineer had arrived, on murder bent, and it seemed to the vicar, who had once held a university championship, that the only answer to such a situation lay in a straight left. Accordingly he stretched out an arm and allowed the sailor to run into it. The result was immediately gratifying and it held also an element of surprise, for as the engineer rebounded into the gutter, the sausages flew from his hand and vanished.

Then, in the words of the vicar, everything suddenly burst out ticking, for there on the cobbles lay scattered a collection of excellent watches, whose mint condition and arrogant sparkle fairly shrieked the word " contraband." Hubbard panted up, still holding the banana which in a twinkling became once again a whistle, and speedily half-nelsoned the dazed sailor to his feet. Eddie, who had recovered both breath and wits, now hovered on the edge of the group, ready to run or to parley, depending upon which way the cat jumped.

Then all began to talk at once and by degrees the fantastic tale was told. Little by little the vicar began to say less and less. Finally he advised the policeman to take the engineer in charge as being in flagrante delicto, and held himself responsible for the custody of Eddie, should he be required for further questioning.

" I don't know about this fragrant business," said Hubbard doubtfully, " but there's no doubt we caught the other fellow with the goods, so to speak, so I'd better take him along to the station. All Eddie ever had was a couple of pound of sausages, so far as I could see, and I don't know as I could prove they were stolen. If you'll speak for him, sir, that's good enough for me." And he led the sailor away.

Hubbard returned to see the vicar later that afternoon. He was in a mood of sober elation, savouring still the compliments of his station sergeant and rejoicing in the plain-clothes duty to which he had been restored. The vicar asked him what would be done about Eddie, and the constable rubbed his chin thoughtfully. " They'll want to see him, of course, but he may slide out of it this time. He's a known wrong 'un, you know, sir."

" Aren't we all, officer? " said the clergyman.

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Hubbard looked at him sharply, and suddenly burst out with the question that had been worrying him ever since the arrest. "You wouldn't hardly think a whistle could turn into a banana, would you, sir?"

"I should think it most unlikely," replied the other, with a wary smile.

"Well, it did, you know," said the policeman stubbornly. "Then what about all that other business with the sausages and the watches? what did you make of that?"

"Very little, officer, but then we were all a little excited, and there is always a tendency to imagine things at such times. Perhaps our friends were guilty of a little sleight-of-hand. Nothing more. I certainly shouldn't let it worry you."

"No . . ." said Hubbard, still undecided. "I'm glad you got the shoes back, sir. Are they anything to do with the church?"

"With this church, yes," the vicar replied. "We have always had a special interest in Crispin, who, as you may know, is the patron saint of the cordwainers and workers in leather. Every year on his festival day we bless these shoes and hoist them up the flagstaff on the church tower. They had blown down, and that is how your friend—the Dip, do you call him?—came by them."

Hubbard nodded without interest. "Nothing very special about them, then. I mean, they're not worth any money?"

The priest looked at him with a gentle smile. "No, nothing special," he replied. "They are the sort of shoes a medieval jester would have worn. These in fact were modelled from an actual pair said to have been worn by a Saxon clown at the court of an early Henry. His name was Pandulf, and he was hailed as a magician at that time. In these days we should probably call him an illusionist. Well, don't let me detain you, officer. I expect you have a lot of things to do. Good night."

"That's right, sir. Good night." And Hubbard went his way.

The vicar lingered a moment longer in the shadowy church, fondling the beautiful red leather shoes. Then he mounted inside the belfry tower to the leads, and hoisted the shoes once again to the top of the mast. He paused a while to look out over the dark roofs of the city and the silver strip of river, and it seemed to him that from far away across the Kent and Surrey fields, now insistent, now subdued, came the thin and tinkling music of a jester's cap and bells.

★ ★ ★

*When you have finished reading this copy of ARGOSY, why not pass it on to a member of H.M. Forces?*

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# *Putting It Across*

**Iris rippled her sequinned hips and her voice got husky**

by CORDELIA BAIRD GROSS

EVERYONE in The Tonic knew that Huie, the page boy, longed to change his name. He was tired of being Hussein Zahid Mohammed. Such problems always sparkled up The Tonic, a night club in New York, when I worked as a secretary there.

"Whatcha folks think of ya gettin' a new name, Huie?" asked Tony, one of the owners of the club.

Huie looked downcast. He was seventeen and awkward, with a dimple in each cheek. "They say I gotta pass algebra first," he said, his eyes black with despair.

"Gee!" cried Tony.

"What's algebra, Huie?" asked Eddie, the barman.

"I don't know," replied Huie. "Some creepy stuff about *x*."

"That sounds very sexy, Huie," said Iris Vaden, the singer, taking a sip of Scotch to help her husky voice.

"Baby knows all about algebra," declared Tony, looking proudly in my direction.

My heart sank. My college degree shone to Tony. I hated to see it lose its bright lustre.

"Baby can fix you up," stated Tony.

"You can?" asked Huie shyly. I was sorry I'd never been very friendly with *x* either.

"I'll try," I said.

We started to work the next afternoon, but it was amazing how much I'd forgotten and how little Huie'd ever known.

"That *x* jumps around so," said Huie. "It's somethin' diffrunt all the time."

"You've got a wonderful name, Huie," I suggested finally. "Why don't you keep it?"

"Aw yeah?" he replied. "You don't know what it's like. People hear 'Mohammed' and right away it's 'Where's your turban?'"

"People can be mighty silly," I said.

"They even tell me about baseball," cried Huie, "and I been

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a Dodger fan all my life. What the heck, I was born in Flushing!"

"You were?" I asked thoughtlessly.

"See what I mean?" exclaimed Huie. "You didn't know either. I gotta get a genuwine hunert-per-cent American name."

"Have you decided what it's to be?" I asked.

"I'm givin' it a lotta thought," he said.

The Tonic was full of advice.

"Huie oughta take somethin' like Reginald Dupont Astor," suggested Eddie. "Ya gotta be forward to get ahead. Ya can't be backward."

"Ain't there a name-book?" asked Tony. "Like this Emlee Post that tells ya when to do the right thing and when to do the wrong?"

"Get something virile, Huie," said Iris.

But Huie and I just plodded along with *x*.

When he started coming in sooner every day, I got a little worried. "We're not trying to make the Honour Roll, are we?" I asked. "Why so early?"

"Naw," said Huie, and he dimpled at the thought. "It's my grandpop. He's moved in with us."

"You don't like him?" I asked.

"He's O.K., but he's crazy," said Huie. "He threw out the radiator, see? We're freezing."

"He doesn't like radiators?" I asked.

"Aw, the room's so small," explained Huie, "and his bed's so big and it has to face Mecca."

"That bed sounds very sexy, Huie," cried Iris, as she stopped by Tony's office to check on our progress. Her face was gay and her amber eyes sparkled enough to glow in the dark. "Gotcha name picked out, honey?" she asked.

"I'm givin' it a lotta thought," Huie replied.

A few weeks later he came in, greatly excited. "The teach gave us the final test to take home!" he cried. "She's gonna pass any guy that gets all the answers!"

When I saw the twenty problems I knew why the teach had been so generous. Every question was a stinker.

"What's the matter, baby?" asked Iris, pausing with Tony in the office doorway after the dinner show. She was wearing a sequin dress and there was absolutely no room under it for anything but Iris. In a few places even Iris had had to get out.

I explained my dilemma.

"I was christened Laverne Pertle," admitted Iris. "I know how Huie feels." She took a sip of Scotch, and it revived her. "Give me that paper," she exclaimed, "and we'll put the show on the road. The bar's crawling tonight. We oughta hit some-

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thing good from Beth Steel or a wheel from General Motors."

"I'll case the big room," added Tony.

With her glass in one hand and the test paper in the other, Iris wove delicately down the hall. Diamonds twinkled in her red-gold hair and tiny lights flashed from her golden gown.

"Honey," she said, gliding up to the first man she recognized, "it's great to see you."

"You're beautiful tonight!" he exclaimed.

Iris rippled her hips, the sequins sparkled, and her voice got even more husky. "You know anything about *x*?" she asked.

"You mean my ex-wife?" he inquired, a little confused.

"Hardly," replied Iris. "I wouldn't think of that doll for ten grand." She moved away.

Huie had entered the bar, a tray of glasses in his hands, and Iris waved the paper confidently at him. Then she walked over to Matthew Kelly, an old friend and a V.I.P. in law.

"Honey," said Iris, "it's great to see you."

"Vaden," replied Mr. Kelly, "you've got everything that opens and shuts."

Iris drew in her left lung and set all the little lights dancing along her prow. "Do you know anything about *x*?" she asked.

"You mean *x* marks the spot?" he suggested.

"That's not the one we want, is it?" asked Iris.

"Not quite," I said. We moved away.

"Darling," called another customer, coming up to Iris, "promise you'll never lose that lovely little thing." He patted her tenderly.

"Honey," said Iris, and leaned yearningly against him, "you know anything about *x*?"

Tony was having a trying time, too. "I always thought these jokers was smarter than me," he complained, when we ran into him some time later. "They don't know nothing!"

"I'd hate to try 'em on the whole alphabet," said Iris bitterly, and went back to her homework.

For some time we'd noticed a stranger sitting at the bar. He seemed oblivious of everyone around him. He just sat there, drinking steadily and staring at a fountain pen in his hand.

"I'll bet he's a brain," whispered Iris. She was getting weary of her fruitless quest, but the sight of Huie's happy, trusting face spurred her on. She walked shimmeringly over to the new man.

"Honey," said Iris, "it's great to see you."

The man continued to stare at his fountain pen.

"I could tell just from looking at you," purred Iris, nestling in a little closer, "that you're the smartest man in this place."

He nodded slightly, his shoulders hunched over the counter.

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"Honey," murmured Iris, so close now her perfume enveloped him, "I'm in trouble. I need your help."

"See this pen?" he asked, and held it up without looking at her.

"Lovely, lovely," she cooed.

"It ain't gotta Swiss movement," he replied, and slid delicately to the floor.

It was long after twelve before Iris ran into Mr. Birnbaum, a music critic.

"Iris," he cried, "you're as compelling as an entrance of horns!"

Iris smiled wanly at him. She never could understand Mr. Birnbaum. "I gotta find *x*," she said.

"*X*?" he asked, "you mean the *x* in algebraic equations?"

Iris looked blankly at me, and I nodded.

"Maths was my subject at Harvard," said Mr. Birnbaum. "I doted on Fourier's Series and Bessel Functions."

"You did, huh?" asked Iris, her eyes glazed, her shoulders drooping.

"What fun!" exclaimed Mr. Birnbaum, taking the paper from Iris's limp hand. "I haven't seen anything so jolly in years."

"Mr. Birnbaum," said Iris earnestly, as she watched him whip out a pencil and sit down happily to his task, "you're very, very sexy this evening. You look very sexy to me."

When Huie went home early in the morning, he carried all the answers with him.

He was off the next day and we had to wait.

"I shoulda told him to phone," said Tony.

When Huie returned the following afternoon, his walk was less clumsy and his black eyes were shining.

"Whatcha know?" he cried, and his dimples flashed. "I passed creepy algebra."

"Well, I should hope so," added Iris.

"Boy, was I sensational!" bragged Huie. "I was the only one in the class gotta hunert!"

"You sure deserved it," said Iris fervently.

"Everyone asked how I knew about *x*," Huie continued.

"What'd you tell them?" I asked.

"I didn't try explainin' much," replied Huie loftily. "I just said, 'Oh, I got friends.'"

"What aboutcha dad?" asked Tony.

"We're goin' to court tomorrow," said Huie, "to get my name fixed legal."

"You got it picked out?" asked Iris.

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"Yeah," Huie replied, "but it was kinda hard. I wanted it real American and to sorta take in my old man too."

"What's it gonna be?" asked Tony.

"Well," explained Huie, "there was a buncha names I liked a lot. But one name sounded just right."

"Vanderbilt?" asked Tony. That was his favourite.

"Reginald Astor?" guessed Iris.

"Smith," said Huie with a radiant smile. "I always liked John Smith."

"Gee!" cried Tony.

"That's a very sexy name, Huie," said Iris.

Huie reached into his pocket and pulled out some small white cards. "I got these printed up, see?" he said. "I wantcha to have the first ones." Very proudly he handed us each a card.

"Do I look like Smith's my name?" he asked shyly.

"Sure, honey," replied Iris quickly, "I'd pick you out for a Smith any time."

"Then nobody'll ask to see our harem again," said Huie with a happy sigh.

I glanced at my card and saw that Hussein Zahid Mohammed had really given it a lot of thought. In neat black letters, he'd had inscribed: JOHN SMITH, JUNIOR.

★ ★ ★

*SOLUTION to ARGOSY CROSSWORD on page 144*

Across. 1, *Stifle.* 5, *Cravat.* 8, *Create.* 11, *Druids.* 15, *Tractor.* 16, *Rutland.* 17, *Utter.* 19, *Adroit.* 20, *Asides.* 24, *Bights.* 25, *Twangs.* 26, *Issue.* 29, *Blarney.* 32, *Nemesis.* 35, *Superb.* 36, *Closet.* 37, *Stroll.* 38, *Elects.*

Down. 2, *Tara.* 3, *Fiat.* 4, *Exert.* 5, *Cadre.* 6, *Abut.* 7, *Aida.* 8, *Credentials.* 9, *Echo of a harp.* 10, *Touts.* 12, *Rural.* 13, *Illiterates.* 14, *Sneezing-fit.* 15, *Tor.* 21, *Osier.* 22, *Steel.* 23, *Sybil.* 28, *Uncle.* 30, *Aunt.* 31, *Nero.* 33, *Mote.* 34, *Sent.*

**IN NEXT MONTH'S ARGOSY**

**RAY BRADBURY**
**MARK DERBY**
**ARTHUR GORDON**
**WILLIAM SAROYAN**

***Brilliant New Stories***

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# HARRY BLACK

## BY

## DAVID WALKER

*Harry Black, crack shot, and famous hunter of tigers, had been severely mauled when the dreaded man-eater of Rimli—alerted by an inexpert bullet from Desmond Tanner—had sprung down suddenly from the jungle pass.*

*Now Harry lies delirious in the Tanners' bungalow at Bondha, where he had recently met again his old friend and prison comrade, Desmond—and Desmond's wife, Christian, who is nursing him back to health.*

*Somewhere in Harry's fevered mind is the treasured memory of his love for Christian as he had first known her on a brief Canadian visit after his wartime escape from the German prison—when he had brought her news of Desmond.*

*Memories are with him as he rouses from delirium . . .*

FIRE above and fire below, my ice-hot dwelling-place, thought Harry Black, rousing from his long dark dream of delirium.

"Hullo, Christian," he said. "Do you remember me?"

"Yes," she said mockingly. "I rather think I do."

She smiled down at Harry with her lips compressed.

"Too dark," he said.

He heard the noise of curtains, so he looked along between his double-sighted nose and saw a verandah and a garden with a wall beyond, and he heard the machinery from Desmond Tanner's sugar factory at Bondha, the noise that he was always hearing, and who should come in but his bearer, Cheddi Khan. Cheddi salaamed with formal dignity with both hands to his brow and inquired about Your Honour's state of health.

"Very good, a kindness," Harry said. "All right," he said in English. He remembered then about Christian's son. "Where's Michael?"

"Find Michael, could you, Cheddi Khan?"

"What's the situation?" Harry asked.

"You're getting better is the situation," said Christian firmly. "Is your headache very bad?" He felt the coolness of her hand

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on his brow. Eau-de-cologne or was it lavender water, he could not quite remember. "Wonderful," he said.

"Here's Michael now."

Michael was standing at the bottom of his bed.

"Michael, my boy," he said.

Michael was there a little longer, but he put both hands up to his face and turned and ran, the loose-limbed child against the light.

"I'm so muddled," Harry said. "I didn't mean to hurt his feelings."

"Michael's feelings aren't hurt. He's glad you're better."

"Is Desmond all right? and Bapu? Were they all right? Did the tiger . . . Help me, Christian."

"Everyone's all right. Sleep again now, Harry."

"You're so good to me," he said.

There was a nurse, a Eurasian Miss Potterswell, of middle age, a shadow woman at his service.

Christian, Desmond, Michael, Cheddi, Doctor Roy Chowdhury, M.D., and occasionally Bapu, that expert native tracker—were the players, with Miss Potterswell as lead, although she was a self-effacing star and so unprima-donnaish that he sometimes wished she would be cross or even shout at him, but she never did . . .

"Salaam, Bapu." The little man, who had entered so quietly, was just the same in his relics of some ex-employer's grey tweed jacket. Almost everyone but Bapu had a Sunday suit.

"The tiger, the Bad One, has gone away," said Bapu. "To the land below the mountains. This is the custom of the Bad One."

"Was the tiger wounded?" Harry asked. The tiger was far off, and he was not concerned with tigers. He was concerned with the vivid, easier, awakening world he found each morning here at

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Bondha where the sugar-crush went on, and the hooter hooting at the eighth hour and the eighth hour marked the rhythm of his peaceful tune. But he knew that his Bad One loomed ever near to Bapu.

"The Bad One was wounded in the back," said Bapu, "but lightly, for there was again a killing yesterday at Ranipur below the mountains, and the bara sahib bahadur's moon is not yet altogether dead."

"What dost thou mean, the great brave master's moon?"

"Did the bara sahib bahadur not bow seven times with money-tinklings of the pocket unto the infant moon on the evening of the Bad One's coming?" Harry remembered turning his money to the moon, and knew he must have been ill a longish time at Bondha.

"The sahib has perhaps forgotten in his sickness, but that was the first day the sahib gave to me two sups of whisky-wine," Bapu prodded delicately.

"I wonder if Cheddi Khan is on the back verandah?" Harry called to the curtained door behind which Miss Potterswell crinkled at her paper. "Give Bapu two pegs of our own whisky."

Cheddi Khan inclined his head an inch. He raised a lordly hand, palm down, and flipped the fingers once to summon jungli Bapu. Cheddi Khan did not approve.

Harry watched the lizards on the wall. The lizards were yellow on the whitewashed wall. He enjoyed the lizards. Miss Potterswell did not enjoy them. Miss Potterswell was not a bit afraid of mice, but she was terrified of lizards because of a distaff superstition that if a lizard fell on you it killed you.

"Don't look round, Miss Potterswell," he would say when she was working on his dressings. "But I think Clarence may be going to pounce on you this very minute." Clarence was larger than Clarissa, and presumed to be the husband lizard.

Miss Potterswell would give a muted squeal and rather love his teasing, and say quaint things like: "Such a chaff, you are!" She took time off in the afternoons from four to seven, so that she could have her little walk when it was cooler in the garden. But only in the garden, because Miss Potterswell had fearful stories of the lusts of men. The odds were on Miss Potterswell, he thought.

So the evening was a good time, and the morning was a good time between Potterswell attentions and his breakfast. Christian would drop in to see him, bareheaded, in her jodhpurs, back from riding the arab pony named Adonis. There was always something she had seen that she could tell him, like a tawny eagle, or like saying that there was a breeze this morning on the wheat which reminded her of Manitoba.

Harry thought of Christian as he had first met her on his Canadian tour after his escape, when he had brought her news of her husband. Desmond had lost his nerve at the last moment and failed to escape with Harry. But Harry had not told her of Desmond's failure, he had spoken loyally of his friend and prison comrade.

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"You still look young," Harry had said to Christian, not paying compliments, but all his thoughts were new, surprising, and benevolent, and he admired the health of people, the strength that grew on him from them, he felt. Each day the pains were with him but pains on the way down and out, so he could be grateful for the lesser and the larger mercies . . .

Late one afternoon they moved his bed out to the verandah where he could watch the goings-on. Young Michael was on the pony.

"Was that better, Harry?" Michael asked eagerly.

"Yes, but lean still farther forward, elbows down, hands close in, and let the pony do it for you."

Michael trotted round the garden anti-clockwise on the outer circuit while Miss Potterswell walked the other way among the flowers. She did not wear her nurse's hat; she wore a sola topee with its oilskin jacket.

"Now to break to a canter with the near-fore leading, sit down and . . . That boy's a natural-born horseman."

"Yes," she said, "and so frustrating for him only riding in the garden, which is why I watch him like a hawk. I suppose we might afford a real child's pony so that I could take him out with me, but it seemed hardly worth it when we're flying home so soon, and Michael going to school in England this September . . ."

He sat in bed with his binoculars to watch the wagtails on the flooded lawn, wet every night and browner every day.

At the crowding-in of night, flying foxes went about their business. After flying foxes and usually before the owlet, Desmond's lope would sound along the gravel, and he would take the steps in two, and call: "How goes it, Harry? Hang on a minute while I get myself a drink." It amused him about hanging on a minute, because minutes did not mean a thing to him; but that was only Desmond's way of talking. They had splendid casual gossips until the needs of the stomach gave importance to the dinner hour. They reminisced a little—about prison and the old days—but past and future both were dim. The present world was Harry's oyster.

Desmond had told him bare details of the tiger episode—that it had swiped Harry with a left hook, so that he had fallen twenty feet and hit his head. Thus far he remembered. He had been saved by falling, for the animal had left him then and made off up the ravine to cover. "Oh yes," he said at the first telling, and shut his eyes to shut the subject off. But Desmond mentioned it again that evening, which was the evening of the March new moon.

"How are the aches and pains?"

"My ribs are a bit precarious, head aches off and on, scratches tickle hellish healthy—I'm almost as good as new."

"It's incredible when you realize how nearly a dead duck you were."

"Was I?" He supposed he must have been—he had risen high from so far down.

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"Have you seen those gashes in you?" Desmond asked.

"Yes," Harry said. "I've had a squint." They were rib-smashing beauties round the right wall of his chest. They were healing nicely, thanks to Miss Potterswell and Doctor Roy Chowdhury, and most of all to the kindness of the Tanners.

"I've waited till now to speak about it, Harry. I'm damned sorry for letting you down again."

"You missed twice," Harry said. "The point about tigers is that people miss them. What's the fuss about?"

"No fuss," said Desmond. "But you told me to hold my fire, and not to shoot at all unless the tiger was committed to the upper level. What did I do? I know what you did—you called the brute off me and down to you."

"You fired too soon on my account," said Harry. "So we're quits."

"I'm not sure I did. I may simply have lost my head."

"Now listen, Desmond," he cajoled him. "If I held post-mortems into things I didn't do dead right according to the book, I'd have been cuckoo long ago. As it is, regard me. Could there be a happier clam?"

Desmond sucked his immemorial tooth. "No," he said, "and long may it continue. But guts, the lack of, never bothered you."

Which by and large was so, he realized, in the sense of physical fears to face. "This last week," he said. "The best I ever had, I think. But I'm sorry for being such a burden on the Tanners."

Desmond sucked in stress again. "I was saying to Christian, and she agreed, what a comfort you are to have about the place."

The spotted owlet perched on a wire to the garden lamp. It was a sedate and talkative small owl; it muttered to itself and stared him out. He stared back at the owl. He was touched at being called a comfort.

And here came Michael Tanner in pyjamas looking for Harry—not Uncle Harry, but plain Harry as he had asked Michael to call him. And Michael often did.

"You and the owlet arrived together," said Harry.

Michael fixed him with a Michael gaze, unblinking and inscrutable, as Christian came out to join them.

"Why do you stare like a python hungry for its dinner?"

"Because I want Plain Harry to tell me a story," Michael said.

"Perhaps he'll tell you one tomorrow," Christian said. "Go on now, darling." Michael protested, dallied, shook hands, said good night, and went in with Desmond.

"Chowdhury says I can sit up in a chair tomorrow. I ought to be elated, but I'm not."

"Why should you be?" Christian said. "It's such a lovely feeling getting well and learning the world from a quiet corner before the world comes nagging."

"Do you think the world must nag?"

"No, Harry. But life has to be battles, doesn't it, to lose and win and start again each day?"

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" You know," he said, " I've never felt serene before, not quite like this." Harry's wish to the sliver of the new March moon had been for this tranquillity.

" Look at all the battles you've been winning," Christian said. She knitted a blue sweater for Michael's English winter. They were steel needles with hard clicks, gleaming under the electric light. The fingers were so supple and so adept, thinking for themselves. The grinding of the sugar-cane continued night and day, but it would soon be over.

" Easy battles, being pampered in a bed."

" To suffer and never to complain, not once. I would call that bravery." She said these nice things quietly for the first time now. He wondered why she said them.

" Talking of serenity," he said, " I can't imagine life defeating you. My mother had the same thing in her different way."

Christian looked down at her knitting once again. " I wonder if your mother felt as terrified as I do about Michael, if she knitted sweaters for you to wear three weeks away in England at the age of eight, and it's only overnight by air these days. No serenity in that jumble of confession."

" I know," he said. He had known that thought in Christian who was now his friend. He had seen it in the fingers flying faster; and he had seen it in her impatience with her only son. " You and Desmond, you're a good strong couple."

" It's a small thing," Christian said, " God helping us."

He was tired. He closed his eyes, and now again he saw the colour of his desert of tranquillity. He was thinking, not about the desert, but about the beauty of the faith that spoke in Christian. He wondered how you came to that. He did not understand it and was not able to accept it, and did not need it here and now, replete with gratitude, contentment.

Christian watched him, smiling too. Peace and trust were strong between them.

" If I could paint," she said, " I would paint you with your eyes closed, smiling there like that. Resignation is perhaps the thing I mean. It wasn't in your face before."

She held the small sweater up. " Well, that's the body almost done," she said in her absent way. It was warmer every evening now, not hot enough to feel sweaty looking at a woollen sweater in the making. " I've been thinking, Harry," Christian said; she went on more hurriedly than her wont, " when you get really well and strong enough to travel, perhaps at the end of March, why don't you take a voyage slowly home by east or west? "

" That's a good idea," Harry said. He had not considered plans. He looked out past Christian to the darkness, thinking of her good idea of a voyage. He shaded his eyes, and then it was not so dark outside, although the moon had set. He saw the garden, the dim plain, a darker line which was the frontier of the forest. He could not see the mountains, but he saw the blackness of the heights of Rimli. The heights of Rimli made a graceful sweep

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beside the sunrise or before the setting of the sun or by a moon or even now below a quilt of stars. The heights of Rimli were well known to him. He had lived in and about them for two weeks, and he had watched them lately too, and they were pleasing except at the hard hours of day.

They now rose of a sudden in their blackness. They menaced him and challenged him grotesquely. "I will do that, I think," he said. "But first I have a small account to settle." His pulse ran up, and he was cold. He shut his eyes again . . .

"What is it, Mr. Black?" asked Miss Potterswell. It strolled across the open ground. It was a burly tiger of great size, the master of the jungle, the killer with a killer's rippling grace.

He saw the Bad One from the corner of his eye, but the Bad One had not noticed him. He had been so right to rely upon his stillness, blended with the jigsaw of the jungle greens.

But the dupe was Harry Black. The tiger came now from the left, silent, terrible, enormous. Now, now, now . . .

"*What is it, Mr. Black?*" Miss Potterswell in night attire and in a twitter, bending over him, that smell of cloves.

The house was a hubbub in the night. "Harry, old boy, are you all right? You let out the most god-awful piercing yell."

"Sorry," Harry said. "I didn't know. I'm quite all right." Had he shouted? What about?

Miss Potterswell retired next door. The verandah whispers went away. The chowkidar hawked loudly in the garden. His ribs were hurting, but that got better and he slept, and in the morning he felt quite all right. Michael came in to see him.

"Mrs. Johnson asked Mummy to go over, so she says could you start me on my Sunday lessons, Harry?" Johnson was Cane Superintendent.

"I can have a try," said Harry. "Anything you say, chum. But it's not my usual line of business, so you'll have to help me."

"Here's Mummy's Bible, you take that, and I keep mine. You have to ask me questions. We have a different one for every Sunday."

He took the printed leaflet and her Bible, where he found a pressed cardinal flower, faded red. "All right," said Harry Black. "Here goes . . . First: which is the great commandment?"

"*Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart and with all thy soul and with all thy mind and with all thy strength*," said Michael rapidly and gravely.

"Full marks. What is the other great commandment?"

"*Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.*"

"What does *thy neighbour* mean?"

"The person in the next house, like the Johnsons, doesn't it?"

"Them and everybody else, the ones you know and ones you don't, the whole bang shooting match, caboodle, and palaver, I would guess."

Michael laughed. "Oh gosh, you're funny."

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He heard Christian's footsteps, and she came in, smiling at them. "We need assistance," Harry said.

"Try to love everyone is what 'love thy neighbour' really means, even if they don't love you," Christian said.

Michael looked at Miss Potterswell's closed door. He leaned to Harry. "I don't love Gottasmell," he hissed. "She absolutely stinks."

Michael was rebuked. He muttered an apology and went.

"He's such a chameleon," she said. "An angel, then a fiend next minute." Christian lowered her voice. "But I must say Michael has a point about her, good nurse though I know she is. Her departure will not be mourned by me."

"Dim. But anti-Michael after beetles in her bed. She's not a bad old thing."

Christian shook her head. She seemed upset. She hardly ever seemed upset.

"What is it, Christian?"

"Oh, nothing. She'll be gone tomorrow."

It was midday, time for his bottled tonic, as prescribed by Doctor Roy Chowdhury, M.D., as administered punctual to the minute by the paragon Miss Potterswell.

"Come in," he said.

"Oh, I did not mean to be a spoil-sport . . ." She often said silly things like that, coyly, but without the slithering sly edge of now.

He looked for some time at starched Miss Potterswell, so humble and so prim of lip. "Miss Potterswell," he said, "when I want you to be a spoil-sport, I shall ring my bedside bell, thank you very much. Now take that stuff away."

She scuttled for the door.

"Just a moment," Harry said. "Ask Cheddi Khan to come here, would you? Then have my crutches ready, please. I'm getting up."

"But Doctor said . . ." Miss Potterswell thought better of what Doctor said. She was afraid of this new icy Mr. Black. She went.

"So that was it."

"Yes," said Christian. "My ally, Mrs. Johnson, passed it on to me. Miss P. was over seeing them last evening—she murmured that you and I enjoyed our talks so much it seemed tactless to disturb us, various small innuendoes. So wicked, Harry, and so untrue, and so typical of my awful sex."

"It's not the sex," he said. "It's the frustrated virgins in it, having to leave their jealous mark behind them somehow. Well, I'm not bothered with the turning of my other cheek. I'll fix the old bitch up."

She smiled, but sadly. "You were turning it," she said.

There had been no strain at all between them in this disembodied time. The strain had now arrived, and not for him because of petty slanders by Miss Potterswell. He was stepping from his cloister, and the world awaited him.

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"Never mind," he said to Christian. He was troubled at the truth of what had been untrue.

He watched her walk away across his room. She was a slender woman. He saw her as a woman now again, touchable, although he had not touched her, and he saw the touchings of her body on her dress, the roundness and the softness and the thrust. "Christian!"

"Yes?" She turned, a hand on the wall beside the door, an arm out straight and bare. He had never held her; why should he deny himself his question? "That pressed red flower. Would it be a cardinal flower—from Canada, from that afternoon, our afternoon on the island?"

She nodded slowly. She shut the door behind her.

He sent Cheddi Khan to Rimli in the car for Bapu. He rang his bedside bell to summon Miss Potterswell and crutches. He was in a hurry now again.

"Until now there have been two killings Ranipur-side," said Bapu, the expert tracker of tigers. "When a third man dies, the Bad One, the man-eater, may return to Rimli, perhaps at the fullness of this moon, who knows?"

Ten days to the March full moon. "Who knows? thou sayest, Bapu. But thou art wise, knowing many hidden things."

Bapu cackled briefly, squatting in the mango's shade in the Bondha garden. "Sahib, only I know that the Bad One waits for me."

"Is there a secret place where the tiger waits for thee?" He watched Bapu.

"Is not every resting-place a secret of the tiger?" Bapu drew his torn and tattered sleeve across his nose slowly, thoughtfully, and quite gracefully from right shoulder all the way along to wrist, and sniffed. He was looking at the heights of Rimli, ugly in a dance of sun. "The tiger travels far to hunt by night and rests by day in secret places. But who am I to say such things to the bara sahib bahadur, killer of many tigers?"

"I am a killer of tigers," Harry said. "But thou art a man born to the secrets of the tiger. Listen now and keep this other secret. Cut two bamboo poles and smaller pieces, and with the strong jungle ropes well known to thee, fashion a chair wherein I may be carried to the Pass of Rimli. Is it understood?"

"It is understood."

Harry watched him lope away. Bapu was always impatient for the comfort of his forest, not usually so impatient that he did not hover until he had planted a notion of two tots of whisky. Why the reverence and why the hurry? What went on in Bapu's mind?

He swung onto his crutches from the basket chair, steadied, and made his way back across the garden. It was only ninety in the shade, but the sun was hot on his weavy head. He should have worn a hat. The wind was dry on his lips and up his nostrils. The wind dried sweat coolly as it broke.

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Manœuvring his crutches, he concentrated on his landfall. "Sail on, O ship of state!" he grunted loudly, making a joke for himself of a hard voyage on a heaving sea.

He rested in the portico beside Christian's potted plants. Now the steps, but they were troublesome. Christian must have been watching, for she came out with her fair hair flying, caught him, and dumped him in a chair.

"You're crazy," she said, with that crossness that her small son, Michael, evoked in her occasionally, when a submerged idiom and Canadian accent reappeared. "You're just plain crazy."

Things stopped going round. He was not plain crazy. He was getting ready as quickly as he could. There was no other way of getting ready. He was not a vegetable now. He had a purpose, and he nursed a grudge against an animal, and that was new and most exciting.

Bapu's Bad One, the man-eater of Rimli, was no longer just a job. Getting strong, however, was a job to be efficiently accomplished without faintings, so perhaps Christian had a point. "Not plain crazy," Harry said. "Plain broken-hearted at Miss Potterswell's departure. I tipped her, whereupon she wept, and Cheddi took her to the station."

"You're so generous," she said. "You pay us far more than it costs us for your board."

"I have nothing else to spend it on," he said. "Not even drink." His tone recalled with bitterness his past failings.

"And no desire for drink at all?" Christian asked gently.

"No desire," he said, "for drink at all." He looked at bigger dust-devils on the open plains, and smaller dust-devils here in the Bondha garden, gathering and darting, those mysterious tornadoes, but they wreaked no havoc, and the dust-devils of the Bondha garden died at the garden wall.

"I think that's wonderful," she said. She stood watching the dust-devils, too. "Please hasten slowly," Christian said. "Please don't go after that tiger till you're really well and strong. Promise me, Harry?"

He was not making promises to Christian.

"Tell me," he said, "how do you contrive to do your hair so well? Have you a feminine accomplice? It has a plain elegance more like a fashion model than a memsahib in the month of March." He said it casually to divert her, but then he rather wished he had not said it because the casual days were over.

"My brush is my accomplice," Christian said, "and you're a flatterer, although I must say a compliment does something for a woman in this climate." She touched her hair, and her face coloured and went pale again. She put on rouge at night. She wore those linen tartan shorts, long ones to the knee. Bermuda shorts, she called them. Her legs were good enough to be even more appealing with low heels. He thought she was going to make off on her shapely legs. Well, if she went down the verandah, he could watch her go. What was the dream last night of Christian

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in Canada that had seemed familiar and those shorts were in it? He could not remember. I'd better check the rifles, Harry thought.

"You and Bapu hatching plots and plans," she said. "How to take Mohammed on his crutches to the mountain, I suppose."

Christian looked down at him and smiled. The wits of Christian Tanner more than matched his own, he realized. "Just a nattering of cronies," Harry said. "I like old Bapu."

"He's nice," she said, "but oh so goaty in the warmer weather. Well, if Michael and I are really flying on the thirtieth, I'd better go and sort his things."

"Three weeks and more," he said. "Talk about being on the hop."

"Is being on the hop another one of your prerogatives?" she snapped at him, and went away.

That night he dreamt about the tiger, and he knew the dream. He remembered it next morning. He used to dream the horror nearly every night. His headaches had stopped now. His wounds were healed, and Doctor Roy Chowdhury, M.D., could strap him tight, and the ribs were hardly any bother. He had three things now to do; the first was to get strong; the second was to find his balance; the third concerned his old war injury: he must harden up the stump and learn to wear his tin leg again.

Harry Black and Desmond strolled the circuit of the garden, and the moon was all but full. He could just manage with one stick and with pauses in the wicker chair.

"... The company do us pretty well," Desmond was saying, "but they have us in a cleft stick. Now today arrives this offer at twice my present salary."

"They must think well of you," Harry said. It was not difficult to know why. Desmond Tanner was shrewd, sensible, and moderate; a good man with his fellow men of any hue. He had not lost energy in this enervating land.

"I think they do," said Desmond without conceit. Vanity and conceit simply were not in him. "It's a pistol at my head, of course. I can accept their wizard offer now, or I can be a clerk in London, or I can stew in my own juice as sugar-factory manager at Bondha. But this offer of a newly created job with fifteen factories to look after in Bihar and the U.P. means touring all the cold weather, and sweating it out in Lucknow all the hot weather, a pretty hellish lonely life for Christian, don't you think?"

What does it matter what I think? They had reached the far end of the garden. It was so light Harry could see every reed or osier or whatever the stuff was, interlaced and slanting in the basket chair. He sat down for a breather and looked back at the bungalow and saw Christian walk along the verandah, and he heard her walking clipped and free. "What does she say?"

"Christian says, of course I must take the job because it's such a splendid offer. But it's not only my life, Harry. It's hers and Michael's. I wish I knew what she really wanted."

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"I expect she wants what you want," Harry said. "And you really want the job, so you'd better take it." That sounded uncompromising. Well, he could not help himself.

"It's a weakness of yours," Desmond said surprisingly, "that you see things simpler than they are. Right or wrong, sort of absolute is what I mean. It's a strength too, compared with my shilly-shallying. I'm not keen on making twice the cash, less whopping income tax, just for the sake of. I wish you'd sound out Christian for me. You're great buddies, and she might spill the beans to you, being a disinterested party, so to speak."

So to speak. "I might try," he said. He might not try. "In any case you can't turn down the offer flat until you know the details."

"No, and they said if I wanted to discuss it, I must fly down to Calcutta the day after tomorrow. That means leaving by car tomorrow evening. You see the point about a pistol at my head?"

"Yes," he said.

He also saw the wall of the moonlit Bondha garden as a wall he had better scale right soon. "How long will you be away?"

"A week or so," said Desmond. "I must say it's a comfort to know you'll be here to look after the others for me. I mean, Johnson's not a bad chap, but he doesn't quite speak Christian's language. Also, he's sugar-happy at the moment."

Harry got up, and they walked again, and Desmond said, "Do you ever think of the miles we used to walk together round and round?"

"Yes," he said. "I do." Their prison life in Germany was always with him in its own compartment.

"If the man-eater comes across," Harry said carefully to his old friend Desmond, "I'll have to go." He had not mentioned any such intention before this; indeed, it was his little secret from the Tanners, and from Cheddi who had joined the Tanners' league.

"Not this week, Harry! You can't possibly go after that animal for another fortnight. Good God, man, you can't even walk a hundred yards without resting."

"I can drive," he said. "I can ride an elephant. I can sit still and shoot. What more do you want?"

"What more I want," said Desmond, "is that you should behave like a reasonable human being, not like a monkey on a stick with tigers on its little brain. You may not care what happens, but we do."

He spoke with the round vehemence of a friend. Harry could not remember any other time that Desmond had rebuked him so forthrightly.

"The best chance is in the Pass of Rimli when the tiger crosses," he explained. "I don't have to be mobile there."

"What if you wound it?"

"I won't wound it," Harry said. "Luck is all I need, and if luck brings that charming animal, I shall kill it."

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Christian crossed the garden towards them. "What are you plotting?" she said.

"Harry threatens to go after the man-eater if it comes soon again. I've been trying to talk sense into the man," Desmond answered. "I wish you'd use your woman's wiles, my love."

"No," Christian said. "I won't."

He saw Desmond's head flick round to Christian.

Harry took Michael with him the next afternoon. The part of the Rimli forest that he knew least well lay on the far side of the salient from Bondha, beyond the flat tongue of jungle jutting roughly south-west from the horseshoe, completing an oval, the upper half encased by cliffs, the lower bounded by the plains.

They followed the Rimli road almost to the forest edge, and the forest greens were dusty now. Harry swung left to skirt the salient, driving by rutted track, and across the sun-seamed land, over a bridged irrigation ditch, and on by bump and bund and dip of rock-hard muttee. The light was harsh. The wheat was ripening, and already the earth thirsted at the beginning of intolerable thirst. There was no wind today. Dust hung for each bullock cart, and rose for each man walking, and dust swirled in here to coat the metal floor, the seats, the wheel, the gear-lever knob, to sift about the stout "Old Bitch," to make dusty millers out of Harry Black and the boy, Michael Tanner.

Harry drove slowly to spare his passenger and to spare his ribs. The strappings were unpleasantly confining. He let Michael change the gears. Michael did not seem to mind the dust or heat or glare or jostling. He was a tough-spirited small boy. Harry enjoyed Michael's companionship in talk or silence. The boy was dear to him as no boy had been before, and he was going to lose this boy—as he had lost everything before.

They came to the wide watercourse that crossed from the forest to join the River Garda. It carried the floods of the Rimli watershed. It was bone-dry at this season. They jolted over and climbed the far bank in low gear.

"Can we stop a minute?" Michael asked. "I've never been here before."

He stopped and switched the "Old Bitch" off, and they got out to see the river. An Indian boy grazed a flock of goats, but what they grazed on was a mystery. He was a child of about Michael's age, pot-bellied, with a lively look and a long Hindu topknot.

"What are those marks on the sandbank in the middle, Harry?"

"They look like a crocodile's tracks, where the old mugger waddled up to have his sunbathe."

"Oh gosh, I've never seen a crocodile. Could we wait for it to come out?"

"There isn't time now," Harry said. "Perhaps another day. But I'm not a crocodile authority. It might be a turtle for all I know. Ask that boy."

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Michael went to ask the boy. He asked him in fluent Hindi. They faced one another, the dark child and the light child, wary puppies of two breeds.

"*Itna, itna bara!*" Michael said with glee, returning. "He says it's a huge old mugger full of silver bracelets and dead ladies' bones."

Harry laughed, and they drove on again. Ahead now was the meeting of the forest and the river, not quite a meeting, for they were separated by the steep ending of the horseshoe ridge. The river flowed hither from the north-west, taking the efflux of the foothills on its flank, making its bed along the utmost margin of the lands of silt; but the fault, which was the Rimli horseshoe, thrust into the silt lands and turned the river here a full right angle away down from the hills.

"Could you shoot the mugger for me, Harry? Then we could make a suitcase, couldn't we, pretty knobbly sort of suitcase?"

"Belly," Harry said, "belly, him belly belly smooth good leather." Michael laughed so hard that the dust streaked on his face.

They went by the forest road on the edge of the fireline. They crossed the *raos*, and ran fast for Rimli, and at the Range Office, Harry's bête noire, that useless poltroon Tara Singh, the Ranger, was waving his arms and prancing fatly.

What Harry had hoped and feared and wanted and not wanted had unquestionably happened, he knew before Tara Singh announced that a man had been killed today in Ranipur beyond the foothills and below the mountains.

"What time was the kill?"

"Just now about one hour back, surely."

"Well done, Ranger Sahib," he said. "Get Bapu. Get four strong men. I shall be here within an hour." It was almost five o'clock.

He had his big rifle in the back, but he had Michael Tanner in the front. "Hold tight, Michael boy," he said. "We're going to belly-bounce like billy-o." He put his left hand on Michael's shoulder, and held him down the five miles bouncing like billy-o to Bondha.

Having delivered Michael safely, he drove back with the men and stopped at the island in the main watercourse, where he and Bapu had separated to inspect tie-ups on the evening of his first encounter with the tiger. From the birth of one moon to the full growth of the next; but it was a longer time than that.

Bapu and the four Garhwalis disembarked. They were chunky, thick-calved little men.

"Cheddi Khan," Harry said, "wait here for the return of these people. Take them and Bapu down. Drive then to Bondha and bring our baggage, everything, to the forest rest-house. Is it understood?"

"It is understood. But, sahib, the tiger may not come, and you are not yet well . . ."

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" The tiger may not come tonight," Harry said patiently enough, " but we must be at Rimli against the tiger's coming."

" The last words of Tanner Sahib to me . . ."

" These are my words, not the words of Tanner Sahib."

" Sahib, let me sit with you tonight. I have served Your Honour many years, and I ask this."

Harry had driven too far too long too fast. He was tired and in some pain. Cheddi Khan knew that the way to sit was to sit alone. But one of the reasons he was fond of Cheddi was that Cheddi did not fear him. He got out and turned his back on Cheddi's mutterings.

Bapu brought the chair, a craftsman's job, and he sat in it. " Quick! " he said, for the day was nearly done.

They ran with a broken step, and the motion was quite pleasant, like a dinghy in a choppy sea, less troublesome to him than the hard-springed joltings of the " Old Bitch." He closed his eyes, and he was Noah in the ark, whisked up steepening waters to ground upon Mount Ararat. He was almost anyone, being rather light of head. The panting hillmen, tough old goats, decanted him at the Pass of Rimli as the sun was setting. " *Shabash!* well done," he said.

He wore a sweater because there would be a chill up here before morning. But it was hot now in the toasted cleft of rock, and no breeze changed the air. " Bapu," he boomed in the closed place, " when will the Bad One come? "

" With a killing at afternoon, who knows? The Bad One may not come. But if the Bad One comes in this night, then surely not early in the night, soon after feeding."

" I think you're right," he said to himself in English. He had a cushion. He was quite comfortable in his niche on the left side of the Pass of Rimli. " Go then, Bapu."

" I will go with these men to the motor-gharri. But I will stay tonight in a tree within hearing of the sahib." Bapu stated this; he did not ask it. He spent half his nights up trees. Harry nodded, and Bapu went.

He was in the middle of the Pass, the horizontal cleft from one watershed to the other. He faced north-east to that opening of the cleft. He saw a pine tree close beyond the opening, and far away he saw the wall of the first big hills. He had the long torch with him, but not fitted to the rifle, for this was the night of the March full moon, and the moon would shine all through the night. He had a place to watch. It was simple. Indeed, this assignation with the last tiger of his life was the simplest in his whole experience, and he looked forward to it more keenly than to any previous assignation.

It was his last tiger, and the first tiger he had ever hated. But he knew that the kill had been too late. The tiger was more likely to cross tomorrow night. Or it might not cross this time at all. Or somebody might shoot it at Ranipur . . . Now stop that, Cassandra, he enjoined himself.

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Night had come, and the moon had risen. It was not yet shining on the smooth bare floor of the Pass of Rimli. This nook of his had a back-rest and a roof. He would be in shadow the whole night. His rib-strappings itched perennially. His aches and pains were better.

He had taken a wake-up pill of dexedrine, provided by his ally, Doctor Roy Chowdhury, M.D.

He felt all right and keen of eye. He had not lost the old skill of banishing his body.

He watched the Ranipur gateway of the Pass. He must never relax vigilance. But he could be too alert, seeing a tiger where there was no tiger, imagining the Bad One's bushy face loom low and stealthy at the gate.

And now something stood in moonlight in the gateway of the Pass of Rimli. The jackal stood there a longish time, although time was not seconds up to minutes and minutes up to hours: time was the sweeping moon, and time was the jackal standing where nothing stood before. It raised and lowered its muzzle. It was satisfied.

The jackal was coming through from Ranipur to Rimli. It walked on the shady side, and even there he could see it clearly, and it did not scavenge-skulk. It walked quite boldly, doglike, foxlike, on the prowl, perhaps twenty yards this way along the Pass until it saw him. The jackal fled brush-low and greyish in the moonlight back to Ranipur.

I bet the little sod will go and tell the Bad One, Harry thought. His mind was fanciful.

And fancy took him on a voyage of time, back to Christian's boat on the Canadian lake.

*The phosphorescence, I do love it, Harry, that molten curl, running running shiver smash another wave is broken and another, and the phosphorescent sea is ours to love—Tell me, Harry. Tell me more things we can love . . .*

*We sail for ever to the Island of Socotra—But life has to be battles, doesn't it, to lose and win and start again each day? That was what you told me—No, my darling, no battles in our ship. Just sailing on and on for ever to our Island at Socotra.*

*We love the flying fishes too, the way they splinter out, glisten skip and skim and dripping drops and gliding on for ever and away until they meet a wave. Happy out and happy in, the happy flying fish. Good-bye then, flying fish.*

Something else was coming through the Pass. It was a small thing, tacking for passage on the moonlit floor. He looked down at the scorpion, hearing a minute scrabble, a tap of hard-shelled claws below him.

He thought of assaulting it with the flask of coffee Christian had made him bring on his moonlit picnic; but he hesitated, not willing to break an impeccable stillness of half a night. It was a problem of the lesser and the greater evil. He who hesitates, he

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thought wittily, cannot put salt on a scorpion's tail. He listened for it in behind him. He decided to break the rules enough to have a look, so he turned his head and saw the scorpion's rear view half a dozen feet away, making a fair scorpion clip for the next bend in the cleft en route to Rimli.

That was a weight off his mind and a shiver off his neck, and no more one-way traffic came as yet from Ranipur. It was midnight, from the angle of the moon. Three would be a likely time, he thought, and the best time, for at that hour the moon would shine squarely from above him and behind him to the entrance of the Pass. It was an eery place, this cleft, a whimsy, freak, or folly of the gods, a that-will-teach-you sort of gouge from times when the earth heaved and split to stand these hills in order, he supposed.

He liked the Pass tonight, more macabre than ever in its wash of moon. He waited for the animal that had mauled him, and had lately haunted him in the defenceless lands of sleep. The rational odds were against its coming, and he knew in his bones that sometime or other, soon or late, before this night was over, the maneater would suddenly be standing, suddenly from nowhere be filling the entrance of its only road to Rimli.

He would put the first soft-nosed bullet from the .465 into the centre of the chest, or if the head was low, then smicky-smack between the eyes, and there might be some hullabaloo, no doubt, at closer quarters, but it would not get as far as here, and if the recoil stirred up his ribs and head, he would not begrudge that pain. The thing was in the bag.

He was uncomfortable in some places, and his head was aching. It was true about small pains tending to balance one another out.

He thought of Christian—and Desmond—while never for an instant wandering from the cold true purpose of his presence there. I don't know even if Christian likes me, he thought. What I mean is that she liked me when I was a sort of chrysalis for conversation safely tucked away in bed.

We were good friends without an edge of any kind, and then one morning I woke in full possession of my senses. And she, who liked me as an interesting invalid, dislikes my real self very much.

She has not changed, but I have changed since that far-off and halcyon time in Canada, those three sad and innocent and lovely days for which she pressed a cardinal flower. I was an honourable dolt. I should have taken her while picking blueberries on our island. It would have been treachery to Desmond, but . . .

Harry heard two noises. First he heard the sawing of a leopard, thrust the blade forward, draw it back. He heard that once. It came up to him from Ranipur, from beyond the gateway, in the wakeful forest. That was a leopard on the prowl, and it could mean alarm, and the leopard feared the tiger.

The night must be wearing through to three o'clock, for now the whole cleft from Harry to the gateway was shadowless before the moon, and now the rock had cooled, and now a puff of mountain wind passed through here and on to Rimli.

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The second sound that Harry heard was a kakar deer barking in the other wakeful forest. The kakar was an alarmist, a barker at anything, including Bapu up a tree.

It was quiet at Ranipur, quiet at Rimli, quiet here. Sand-flies were paying him some attention. How loudly they hummed in his listening ear.

Aggressive, Christian thinks me, tiger-vindictive, lusting to settle my account. She despises hate, so she said one day. Ruthless, she thinks me. A courage fanatic. Well, so I am. An all-or-nothing.

He watched, and still the tiger did not come.

He remembered that golden time with Christian. *Let's pick blueberries, Harry, shall we . . .*

He turned his head to a soft sound close behind him.

The tiger stalked him on its belly in the Pass. Its fangs were bared and its coat had a patterned lustre below the moon.

He screamed.

His right forefinger had lain along the trigger-guard these nine quiet hours. His finger snatched at the trigger, and the present world exploded twice.

Harry screamed again while two bullets went on to Ranipur below the mountains, and one tiger went back to Rimli.

He screamed his terror to the jungles down ahead at Ranipur and down behind at Rimli. He screamed his terror in the March full moon.

"Sahib!" And again: "Sahib!"

It was close now, that jungle voice, coming up and over and in here. "Sahib! Sahib!"

He shrunk farther in. He had not reloaded, and he could not.

"Are you hurt, sahib?" Now it boomed in a cracked way along the cleft.

"Who are you?" he asked.

"It is I, Bapu." And the man came padding, larger than life and under the moon and along the Pass from Rimli.

Harry Black stared up at him. He felt tiny below this Bapu with the round face and the same old jacket. He feared the secret man who stood so still, looking down in here at him, then along the empty cleft to Ranipur. "Has the Bad One come?" he whispered like a conspirator against the Bad One.

"From Rimli."

Bapu snatched the torch from Harry's side without a by-your-leave, and went back along the Pass to Rimli, using the beam to augment the moon, for the moon was sliding down now to the right.

Bapu came back without sound. "It is the Bad One. There is one scarred pug belonging to the Bad One. But how could the Bad One cross by day? Sahib, I do not understand this."

Harry shook his head. He kept on shaking his head and swivelling his eyes to watch Bapu's toes.

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" I sat in the peepul beside the *rao*. I thought I heard a leopard call across the cliff in Ranipur, and then I heard a kakar bark in Rimli. Except for these, I did not hear the *janwar* speak. I heard no other wild things in this part of the night," said Bapu.

Harry nodded for a change, and he put a palm against his chin to stop the chattering.

" The sahib is sick. The bara sahib bahadur was wrong to defy the weakness of his body."

Bapu whipped off his grey tweed jacket, which could not have been dry-cleaned for ages, and he put it like a cloak over the shoulders of the great brave master. He made sympathetic tutting noises. He took the .465, a wonderful weapon by James Purdey. He freed it gently from the clutch of Harry's long-fingered hands with his own blunt-fingered hands, broke it neatly and firmly as a workman handles his familiar tool, and the brass cases flew away ping-ping against the rock, and Bapu leaned in to take two of the shells from two of the five stitched recesses on the right breast of Harry's bush-shirt. He always carried five, making the very lucky number, seven.

The shells slid home with a healthy sonck. The breech clicked shut. " Rest now, sahib. I will stand watch until the dawn." Bapu went away.

Harry did not sleep or rest for the remainder of the night. He drank lukewarm coffee that Christian Tanner had made ready for him in a hurry. And he thought: What will Bapu say about me? It was a new kind of thought for Harry Black.

The men arrived before the sun had topped the hills. Bapu came for him.

" Sahib," said Bapu, " the Bad One did not kill yesterday in the afternoon. The Bad One killed the *day before yesterday* in the afternoon at a far corner of Ranipur below the mountains. This true second message came in the night when we were here . . ."

How simply the inexplicable was explained.

Harry went along. The Gahrwalis stared at him, he knew, as he stared over the Rimli forest in the morning. It was the pretty time of a new day, and the air was cool, and jungle-cock crowed the morning in the jungle.

Harry feared the tiger everywhere as his carriers picked a running way along and round and down the bouldered watercourse, widening to safety, but it was not safe. He saw the tiger in the wavings of the pale dead grass. He heard the tiger in a slither and a rattle in a bamboo clump. He saw the tiger in the early shadows.

He was in his delirium dream again, a version of his dream, and soon now, any second now, surely now he would wake up to smell cloves from kind Miss Potterswell, to hear Desmond's voice of comfort: *Harry, old boy, are you all right?* He was still in his dream, and there was Cheddi Khan standing beside the " Old Bitch " at the island. Cheddi and Bapu exchanged whispers. They all stared at him. They gloated at him secretly.

" Sahib, you have a fever," Cheddi said with pity or contempt.

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Perhaps he had a fever, but it was a cold one. He felt safer and safer on the slow way down. He did not mind that Cheddi drove atrociously, as always. He did not mind the bumps, the dust, or anything, and at last they reached the forest rest-house, where chowkidar waited to salaam with smiles.

He went inside the room, a dingy ghost of all the forest rest-house rooms that he had known.

"The bed is ready," Cheddi said. "Breakfast, sahib?"

"Bring tea," he said. He sat down in the long-armed Roorkee chair. He closed his eyes, knowing now that this was not a dream of his.

"Your Honour, you must eat and sleep," said Cheddi Khan, with tea, "and I will drive to Bondha for the doctor."

"I do not need the doctor," Harry said. "You will in no wise go to Bondha, is it understood? Put the tea beside me. Go away."

He drank hot sweet brown tea. He felt it do his body good. He was not afraid now behind doors and shutters in the room, darker than the Pass had been last night. But all the things that he had ever done were now undone by his jellied panic in the Pass of Rimli.

He half filled his mug again with tea. He went over to the cupboard. There were seven virgin bottles in the opened case—and seven bottles was a lovely lucky lot of ammunition not to see the end of.

He laced the mug up to the brim, and drank it tepid, like Christian's coffee. Soon Cheddi came with inquiries about eggs for breakfast, with pious clucks and frowns of disapproval, and—with pleadings.

"Oh, go to hell," said Harry Black.

Cheddi went.

He admired the first brown bottle, down a bit. "My friend," he said. He scuttled off to heaven with his friend.

The oil lamp and the table and the charpoy and the walls were heaving, and the floor heaved most of all. He went creepy-crawly to the *ghusal-khana*, to the bathroom, with a sort of picture of a cobra in his head, and he reached the thunder-box. He made that all right, and he was sick all right. He rested on the immemorial chasm, and then he closed the lid with proper decency and went creepy-crawly back to bed to finish up Friend Number Two. Friend Number Three was waiting, and so were Four, Five, Six, and Seven. He had them with him. He did not trust that mucker, Cheddi Khan.

Then light came through the shutters, hateful light but very little of it, coinciding with the dying of his oil lamp, out of juice, poor thirsty butti. Some daylight escaped in, not enough to hurt, enough to see to do things, and enough to see a lizard in a corner of the ceiling.

It was not a nice lizard like what's-their-names, like Clarence and Clarissa, the cheerful little yellow dragons having fun and

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games at Bondha. This lizard had no tail. He was offended by the lizard's rude appearance. He disliked the way it swam about the ceiling, and the vulgar chirpings were unpleasant too. He shouted at the lizards, who pretended not to hear him. He closed his eyes, quite angry; then everything swam round, not only lizards, and when he opened them, the horrid coupled beasts were staring at him.

The tail-less lizards squeaked at him. He could not stand such insolence a moment longer. The law of the jungle, after all. Manifest destiny says: kill. I know Christian would disapprove. She disapproves of hurting anything. I'm sorry, hateful lizards.

He held his automatic pistol in both hands. He closed an eye and took most careful aim. The lizard swam round and round. The muzzle of the .38 swam round and round. He was not in any hurry. He kept on aiming till they all swam round together. Then he fired. The lizard fell with flailing arms and legs. It was a damned good shot, as good a pistol shot as he had ever made.

Rattlings of doors. They were bolted for the privacy that every self-respecting chap demands. "Sahib! Sahib!"

"Do let me have some peace," he called to that infernal pest. "I'm shooting lizards."

He had another drink of Number Three. Then he went off walking once again. He walked deliriously alone between the corpses of some tail-less tigers in the lower jungle here at Rimli on a forest path. But there was another one he had to find . . .

"Oh, hullo," Harry said. "How nice to see you." He saw her dimly. There was the rather wonderful strange thing of knowing it was her even in an Underground if all the lights went out, say at Green Park Station.

But all the lights now suddenly went on, hard lights of torture like them grilling you.

"Shut it! Please shut it!" He put his hands up.

"No," Christian said, "not until this stink blows out. I'm sorry." Not sorry, only saying it, the cruel woman, window open too.

"What time is it?" he asked.

"Noon," she said. Funny, saying noon the new-world way.

"Awfully sorry," Harry said. "Elastic bandage stinks. Ribs O.K. now. Take it off tomorrow."

"The bandage doesn't stink. The whisky does." Then she relented and she closed the place again.

"Where's Michael?"

"He's at home."

"Why you come?"

"Because Desmond would have wanted me to come. Drink this."

"What?"

"Clear soup."

"No."

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" Drink it, damn you," Christian said. He drank some because he was afraid of her, but he was very sick.

" My fault," she said. " I should have had the basin handy."

He heard the scrubbing noise, and he looked over. She was on her hands and knees in a pair of shorts he did not know, and her back arched up in a lovely hollow, heaving curve from thighs to shoulders at the scrubbing. The smell of creosol was bad, but not so bad as soup.

" Y' can't do that. Get sweeper."

" I would not insult the sweeper," Christian said.

" Well, that's that." She stood again and held the bucket.

" Have to tell you . . ." He was trying very hard. " Have to tell you. Only woman I ever liked in all my life."

She went over and stooped and came back and slapped the cold thing on his face. " Lizards," she said. " You like lizards." She dropped the lizard in the bucket.

" I know," he said. " I'm sorry."

" Now drink the rest of this."

" Can't," he said. " Kill me."

" All right, I'll kill you." So he drank the soup, which swelled about him in his seething guts, then seemed to settle.

Christian wiped his face. She gave him something else to drink, bitter, like a drug he knew.

" Thank you," Harry said. " Please don't go. Please . . ." He looked at her. He was surprised to see tears rolling, slithering, and slipping down her face that swayed beside him. " Please stay, Christian."

" Next room," she said. " Now sleep." Peculiar how she could cry so hard like that, and her voice be her own sweet sobless voice . . .

He woke up and he could not find it. Number Four, he thought, surely, wasn't it? Four from seven leaves three precisely. But Four was not on his bedside table. Five, Six, and Seven nowhere to be seen.

He shouted for Cheddi Khan, who arrived intolerably later rather than sooner with a rude knock and a tea-tray.

" Take that muck away," Harry said. " Bring the whisky."

" The memsahib waits in the other room," said Cheddi Khan. And he added pointedly and gravely, " The Lady Sahib."

Well, that meant Christian, for whom Cheddi Khan had an unprecedented, reverent devotion.

" The Lady Sahib has done sweeper's work today," said Cheddi Khan in Urdu. " You shave," he added in his tolerable English, which he had never used to his employer. He spoke English now as insult and rebuke.

Harry shaved in bed. He managed a water biscuit and a cup of tea. He put on his tin leg, sunproof trousers, a faded dark blue shirt, sambar leather shoes—most respectable warm-weather clothes—and his own particular stuff from London on his hair.

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Cheddi proffered crutches, but he declined them. The horror and the need, the weaving waves, the dread and the miasma.

He made it to the door, whence an arm-stretch took him to the table. " Sit down," she said.

He sat on the small chair, and she was sitting in the big chair in the corner by the fireplace with a book of his. The verandah door was open, and the sun was low, he noticed. The bottles were beside him. " I've got to have a drink," he said. " Sorry, got to."

She came over and gathered the four bottles, the three and a half of whisky, to her bosom with her bare arms across, like hugging four midget babies, between, athwart, and crowded on her breasts. The whisky was what he wanted.

" No," said Christian. " Nothing doing."

" Just one. I must, Christian. Don't you understand? "

She did not answer, did not even seem to bother, simply sat again, and put the bottles on the floor between her knees as guardians, damn her.

Cheddi placed a second cup of tea beside him on the ugly rest-house table. " For God's sake go away," he said to Cheddi Khan, who waited for instructions from the Lady Sahib; then went.

" Why did you come? "

" I told you," Christian said. " Because Desmond would have wanted me to come."

How to get rid of her and get the drink, knotty problem, cunning needed, and he feared her. He tried wheedling. She did not answer.

He was angered by these ill-manners into ill-manneredness himself. " I wish you'd mind your own damned business," Harry said.

" I wish you'd let me," Christian said.

He was ashamed of himself for not being a gentleman when drunk. " I apologize," he said. " I only meant . . ." But he could not quite remember what he meant. He could not remember anything at all except one thing vaguely.

" What happened, Christian? "

" Nothing much," she said. " Nothing more noteworthy than a jag."

" First jag," he said. " First one ever."

" My first one too. Quite fascinating."

" Do you have to be so bitter? "

" Poor Harry, should I say? " Her voice was cold and small and pitiless, not her warm open-hearted voice.

He had done something unmentionable, Harry thought, because a thing he could remember was Christian weeping, yet talking in her limpid sobless voice. " Did I make you cry? " he asked.

" No," she said. " You never did and never will."

" Once you did cry long ago," he said. " I was remembering that perhaps. Do you remember that? "

" No," she said. " I do not remember that. Now let's deal with all your mucking bottles." He could hardly believe such language from Christian, the fair, gentle, terrifying woman.

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"You love pistol practice at the lizards. To pour away your liquor would be much too tame. Outside to the verandah, Harry. Go on out!"

She was hard on him, not even helping when he stumbled. She lined the bottles up, and then she brought his automatic pistol, which held eight, but one was gone already. "Shoot them!" she said. "Go right ahead and shoot your friends."

It seemed a bit ridiculous to him, but he went right ahead and shot them at about ten feet, three misses, last shot last bottle. Well, he had plenty of spare ammunition, and the bottles certainly disintegrated with amusing violence and splash and shard. But then, of course, the trouble was that he had lost his bottles.

She took away the pistol. She brought sun-glasses for him and sat beside him on the other chair. "Oh dear," she said in her own soft voice again, "what a melodramatic bitch I am."

Harry shut his eyes behind his glasses against the abominable world without. He opened them against the abominable world within.

"Tell me what happened, Harry."

"The tiger came the wrong way round," he said, shutting again to think to say it right. "I was facing Ranipur, and just at that moment, I can remember very well, I was thinking of you and the day we went sailing to the island. I heard a noise, and I looked round, and the tiger was coming slowly for me on its belly. My finger pulled both triggers. The shots went off to Ranipur. All I did was scream my head off."

"Bapu said you frightened the Bad One by roaring more fiercely than the Bad One. Cheddi Khan translated."

"Did he translate that I was paralysed with terror? Did he translate that Bapu had to take the rifle out of my hands and guard the great brave master until morning? Did he mention my behaviour coming down the hill?"

"Poor Harry," Christian said. "Have you never been afraid before?"

"Of course," he said, "but not panic-stricken to a jelly." He shivered, seeing it again now, for the easement of the alcohol was dead in him; and why the hell should Christian Tanner take away his comfort? "I can't," he said. "I can't."

"You can fail like anybody else," she said, less kindly. "It was high time that you did, and now you have."

So hard on him. "Only thing I hadn't failed in," Harry said. "Don't you understand?"

"I might understand," she said. "But I can't sympathize. If you cared about a battle then you always won it. Now you're finding out the facts of life."

"I've made even you hate me," Harry said. "I can't. I can't face it, Christian."

But when he turned, he saw that she was weeping in the way he thought that he had seen her weep before. He had been provided with a silk handkerchief by Cheddi Khan. He gave her that.

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"But you must," Christian said in her sobless voice. "You must, Harry." She dried her tears. "Such an idiot," she said. "I'm going home.

"I have three more of those sleeping-powders in my bag inside," she said, "the ones you had when you were in bed. Eat something, Harry, and take two, and go to sleep." She looked at him. It was a hard and level glance. "Can I trust you by yourself?"

"I don't know," he said because he did not know himself, and now he had no drink to help himself.

"Promise me!"

"All right," he said, "I promise." And there was a grievous thing—"Can't ask you to forgive me."

"I think we both might ask forgiveness," she said.

THAT night a boy was taken from the Taungya village in the lower forest. The boy slept in a high-walled pen among his goats. The people of the village heard a bleating, but men did not venture out by night for bleating goats, and in the morning eighteen goats were present and correct without the goatherd. No tracks were found. No blood was found. A child of ten had vanished.

Meanwhile Harry slept.

"Why was I not told sooner?" he said in the afternoon, petulant, thankful that he had not heard the news before.

"The Lady Sahib said that Your Honour must be left to sleep."

To sleep a jag off by command of Mrs. Tanner, damn her. He was purged of his digestive juices, dehydrated, stiff.

"There is more to tell, sahib," Cheddi said. He waited courteously for permission to continue.

"Well?"

"It concerns Bapu. There is danger now for Bapu. This morning as he went to track the tiger from the Taungya village, men lay in wait for him and stoned him, and Bapu fled, firing a shot from his ancient gun, but over the heads of the villagers to halt them."

"Was Bapu hurt?"

"He was struck by a stone and lightly bruised. There is this also about Bapu: last evening, when we followed the Bondha motor to the forest gate, and were returning, Bapu said, 'I hear the *janwar* speak. Leave me in the jungle.' I left Bapu in the lower jungle, and it was before the time of the crying of the goats. I have told this to no man. Sahib, I do not believe these jungli fears, but there are strange things about Bapu. These common people say Bapu is in league with man-eater, advising as to next victim. They say, 'Why is Bapu never seen by a single human soul at time of killing?' They say, '*Bapu is man-eater personally.* We kill him and we are safe at last from scourge.'"

"Are there not strange things about all men?"

"That is true," said Cheddi Khan, adding carefully and coldly, "about all men."

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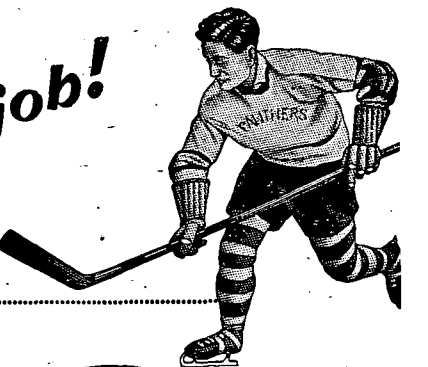

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Strange things thought and dark things done. " From tonight apu will sleep here in this house. Tell him my order."

" Very good, Your Honour."

" Go now to the Range Office and ask Tara Singh when the ephant will come."

He went to the bookshelf. He stared at them, his old companions. What was this you said to me, that the memsahib did sweeper's ork? "

No reply.

" Speak, Cheddi Khan."

" Sahib," said Cheddi with compassion, " a strong man may be eak."

Harry found a bit of paper and wrote on it: *I'm sorry, Christian,* id put the paper in an envelope.

" Take this to the memsahib."

" *Jawab howega?* Will there be an answer? ".

" No," he said.

It was dusk when Cheddi Khan returned. " The elephant will me tomorrow morning, sahib."

" All right," he said in English.

" The Lady Sahib was waiting in the bungalow at Bondha, and ter reading, smiled, said, ' Thank the sahib,' and went away."

The forest elephant did not come next morning. Harry had arnt long ago to close his mind to the frustrations of what never ppens in India tomorrow. But now frustration was conspiracy, d now he could not go on foot, and now he dared not go on foot.

" The Bad One is in the lower forest," Bapu said. They scoured e lower forest, driving, stopping while Bapu searched for tracks. That evening they dragged a sack contraption behind the car. hey dragged it on a track three miles along the fireline that vided the upper Rimli jungle bounded by the horseshoe ridges om the lower Rimli jungle bounded by the plains. It made a vathe of comparative smoothness in the ruts and dust. The dust as deep—fine as talcum, soft to the foot as powder snow. A nther had crossed it in the night, a python, a sloth bear, and any of the hunters and the hunted. But no tiger crossed it.

The elephant had not arrived. This was Harry's third dry day, it would be three days completed by whatever time the Lady hib had cut him off. He was eating largely now again. He had ipped the stinking plaster from his ribs. The scars were healthy, hough tender still. They were a purplish pink, a neatly taloned stimony to what still waited where they came from.

" Sahib," said Bapu in the afternoon, " the motor-gharri does t serve to search the lower forest. Could Your Honour walk a all distance with Your Honour's hand upon my shoulder? "

He had suspected this from confabulations between Cheddi han and Bapu, whispering below the banyan tree behind the st-house. He had caught them at it. " Where? "

" From the Taungya path down the large *rao* by the salt lick

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and the waterhole and to the forest road. Four furlongs onl
Would this, with many rests, be possible?"

Four Bapu furlongs, meaning six or seven, but in a wide wate
course. It might have been much worse. They knew that h
could do this. They would pin him down to do this. The h
wind cooled him at the thought of doing this.

"Go slowly, sahib," said Cheddi Khan. "I shall be waitin
at the crossing of the *rao*."

They started down the *rao*, near-white and blinding in the su
This was the watercourse into which all others flowed. It was
wide watercourse and pretty safe; but he could have used a nij
say a few fluid ounces from the residual bottles he had shot at th
behest of Christian Tanner, damn the woman, prodding when h
was afraid, stirring with him in his dreams at night. Life is har
he thought, his hand on Bapu's shoulder. Life is far too muckin
complicated for a little man who knows himself.

But Bapu's shoulder was no longer there. Bapu had vanishe
like the Calibanish Ariel he was. The reason showed itself,
party of the Taungya peasants, armed with lathis. Loquacio
people; silent now, panting in the heat of afternoon.

"What is it, my brothers?"

It was that they had heard the car. It was that one of them ha
lost his son. It was that their wheat was ripe and they dare n
cut it near the forest. They were after Bapu, but they did not sa
his name or the name of his other self, the tiger.

Harry spoke gently to them. He took some time about i
soothing and cajoling. These were living creatures that he d
not fear and they were instruments he knew well how to pla
When he judged them softened from their dangerous resolve, h
made a licentious joke. They laughed. He then blistered then
He warned them viciously, made a second jest, and they we
home. He thought it might be all right for Bapu till there w
another human kill.

The voices dwindled. "Bapu!" he called softly.

Bapu emerged from a hiding-place in tangled flotsam of th
rainy season. Bapu made obeisance to him again. Bapu trus
me, Harry thought, and they went on down the middle of the *r*
with thirty yards of safety either side. He hoped that Bapu woul
not find the pugmarks of the tiger.

But Bapu had. "Sahib," he said in his sepulchral whispe
"the Bad One came down the *rao* last night and drank and we
on yonder." He made his graceful sweep of hand over the low
reaches of the Rimli salient, two miles wide, two miles deep—a fl
labyrinth of forest, shallow-ditched with many tiger places.

They sat back to back on a sizeable hot boulder, a reservoir
heat. Nothing came yet to the waterhole, and nothing moved c
land beyond. He was thirsty, a genuine cold-tea-wanting thirs
but the tea was in the car.

"Bapu, I have had this thought: that we might close up th
Pass of Rimli with a great explosion, thus keeping the tiger f

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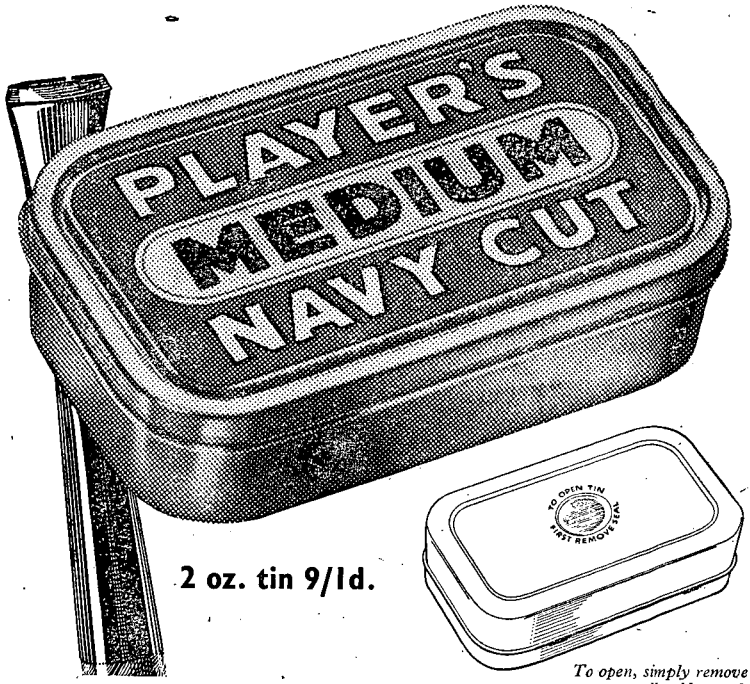


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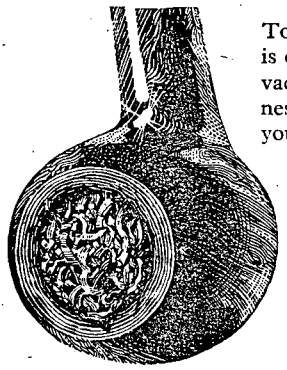

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ourselves alone. To this end, Tanner Sahib will bring with him a box of the material called dynamite."

He wondered how Bapu would react. He wondered when Desmond would come back. He thought: Christian and Michael leave for England a week today. And then? What then? I might have given up this tiger. Why not? Why play at being superman? I've lost my nerve. Well, look at all the other chaps who lost their nerve.

Bapu was the stillest little sitter in the world, but Bapu moved against him.

*I could pretend here for a while, and then fly home and then quite casually by mistake on purpose happen to be passing and drop in to see them at this cottage they have rented down in Dorset, down in Dorset, how conventional.*

*Thou saidest: I am sick of love*
*Stay me with flagons, comfort me*
*With apples for my pains thereof . . .*

Bapu fidgets. He is horrified. I thought he would be. "Oh sahib," said Bapu in cracked distress, "if the Bad One is denied its road to Ranipur below the mountains, then surely they will kill me. The Bad One waits for me, and yet I do not fear the Bad One. But, sahib, I fear the wickedness of men." Bapu trembled.

"I do not understand this, Bapu, that thou fearest men yet not the tiger." Harry saw it stalking on its belly. He saw the bloody jowls. He saw that forearm whip for the invisible left hook.

"The sahib has the hard way of the soldier, knowing fear and courage and understanding all things if the sahib so wills."

A delicate prevarication. Such delicacy in this jungle man. How delicately he imparts his little dig at me.

"Bapu . . ." he said. He listened to the wind . . . "was thy Bad One born at Rimli, Bapu?"

Bapu's back was absolutely still. "Sahib, I think that this is so."

There was a silence of the two men here between the jungle in the loudness of the wind and yet another sound, that came now above and through the loudness of the wind. Harry faced directly to that sound, not a steady sound, a steady rushing as was the rushing of the hot-weather wind.

It was periodic—short blast and short again, blast, blast continued of the hooter at the sugar factory at Bondha, three miles or so away. It was imperative and urgent and alarming. It said *Alarm* as unequivocally as an air-raid siren wails *Alarm.* It stood the two men up. It hurried them two furlongs down the watercourse, arm across shoulder, arm round waist, the large man leaning on the small man.

Harry drove at fifty miles an hour along the road, which served also as a lesser fireline, running the length of the Rimli salient. The wind was dying with the day, and wild things were on the move. A sambar hind stood bell-eared on the road, the big brown deer, and wove and plunged, and she was gone.

Here was the junction with the Rimli-Bondha road. Here the

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jungle thinned, and he saw a gleam. Was that a fire? No, it was the tall metal chimney of the factory at Bondha. No smoke, no fire. "Hang on," he said to dusty Cheddi Khan and Bapu.

Christian, Johnson, babus, servants, Doctor Roy Chowdhury, M.D., and the syce held Michael's terrified arab pony, which was in a muck-sweat.

"You've come," Christian said.

Michael had ridden at four o'clock. He had started his usual circuits inside the garden wall, trotting and cantering. Yes, the gardener was here, and the syce had watched a while, then gone back to the stable. Christian had been sleeping. Michael and his pony, Adonis, were last seen trotting fast, and wide of the curving forest in the direction of the River Garda. Adonis was next seen coming at a gallop from the forest gate through which Harry had now passed. Babel, talk, confusion. Christian was quiet, watching Harry.

"I wonder if he could have gone to look for that big crocodile?"

She nodded. "Might," she said.

The little fool, he thought. Can't blame him, just the sort of thing I used to do.

Runaway horses take the short road home. This pony might have taken a short cut from the crocodile place clean across the Rimli salient to Bondha. This pony pulls. This pony is not only blown. I think it has been badly frightened.

"Bapu, hast thou seen the tracks of a shod-horse galloping? Fresh tracks?"

"Sahib, I saw this in the *rao* as we hurried from our sitting place to the motor-gharri. The *rao* is used as a wide safe road by men with horses. The headman of the Taungya village has a horse of the size of this horse here, but it does not wear the iron shoes."

Harry looked at Christian. He thought that she could take the likely truth. He thought that she could take any truth she had to take.

"I think he went round to look at that crocodile. I think the pony got out of control and made for home. Michael might have been dismounted. If so, he's walking back. If not, I think he either fell off near the river on the open ground, or in the jungle between the corner of the *rao* and the forest gate—we came along the *rao* ourselves, and would have seen him. Johnson, you go round to the river with Cheddi Khan."

Harry explained in detail how and where to go. "Bapu and I will go in the factory Land Rover, and then on foot." *On foot*, he thought. On foot in the dark in the bottom of the lower forest where the tiger moved last night.

"We need one more man to hold the torch." *I can't*, he thought. Another thing he could not do was to ask Christian Tanner for a drink.

"I will come," said that funny little doctor. "I personally will come with pleasure." Never set foot in jungles in his life, good for Doctor Roy Chowdhury, the only volunteer, it seemed.

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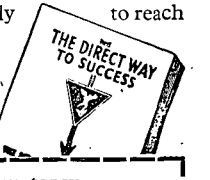


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" No, Doctor. You must be here in case Michael has been hurt," id Christian quietly. " I'm going."

" I said a man," he said.

" He is my son," she said, " and I am going." She wore her ıorts, unsuitable jungle garb. She was a phenomenally cool ɔman. " I'm damned well going," Christian said less coolly.

He drove the Bondha car, with Christian, Bapu, and the driver. ɔhnson and Cheddi followed. He stopped at the parting of their ays. He noticed that Johnson was in a stew. Thick jungle did ɔt lie ahead of Johnson. He addressed himself to Cheddi. " If ɔu find Michael, blow the horn again and again. If you do not ıd him, try to work along the *rao* to where you waited with the r before. Then listen. Is it understood? "

" Sahib, it is understood." And Cheddi smiled.

Harry drove again. The sun was broadening to touch the earth. " I shouldn't have slept this afternoon," Christian said to herself him, " I never do. But I was so tired out. And I should have ıessed, because he kept on asking when you would come, and you ıd promised to take him to the mugger place, and so few days ft, and I was cross with him at lunch today. Oh dear, is there ıything I don't do wrong? "

" You do nothing wrong," he said. He put his left hand on her ght hand on her bare knee for a moment, the first time he had ɔne such a thing, and this was to give comfort and to take it from r. Harry Black was much afraid. He took his hand away.

" Is the tiger down this end? " she asked.

" It might be anywhere," he said. " It might be up at the top Rimli. It may have gone back to Ranipur." He could smell at soft scent of hers, soft in the hardness of the dust.

They were in the forest in the warm moment of the sunset. He ɔpped at the T-junction. The Rimli road went right. The road ross the bottom of the salient went straight ahead. He had ıvelled it the other way quite recently this evening. A jungle th bisected the angle of the roads. It ran a mile from here to the rner of the *rao* beside the waterhole. It was a narrow, jinking th. The thought of walking it in daytime would suffice to make m sweat.

Bapu found the tracks at once. " It is as we thought, sahib. By is path the Bondha horse has come."

Parakeets were screaming in to roost, the small parties and the g, the ones and tens and hundreds in their needled flight to rch, to rise again, to twist and wheel and stoop again with wild andon, green birds at the end of day, the screaming, graceful rakeets.

" Stay here," he told the Bondha driver. " Keep the headlights rning. Keep the engine running."

" Sahib, I fear to stay here in the jungle," the driver said.

" Safely in a motor? The memsahib does not fear to walk there ɔ danger."

" Should we shout for Michael? " Christian asked.

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"Not yet. Bapu will read the tracks. He goes first with th small rifle. You go second. Your job is to give him light, and t shine the torch out where I tell you. But not in our eyes. O.K.?

"O.K.," she said. "Behind too?"

"Where I tell you, don't you understand?" Behind, he thought Behind my back, the most likely place. He shivered. He coul not help it. "Go quickly, Bapu."

The parakeets were settling now to sleep. Night hurried in He followed Christian, and the three of them in single file an close together. Cheddi and Johnson would soon be round ther at the river. Please let them find him now before we reach dee jungle in the darkness. Was that? He whipped round. Nothing

Bapu went at a slow walk. It was sal forest on either side, leaf carpeted and noisy. "Right." She swung the torch quickl round and slowly back across the grey-barked columns of the sa lighting up a pair of eyes. The beam was steady. "Civet," Harr said. He heard his voice crack up. "All right."

Her eyes flicked round to him, then on to business, lightin Bapu. What could have possessed him to let Christian come? *I'* *damned well going*, Christian had said. She said things and she di them. She was frightened now.

The sal forest ended. Now a ditch. Halfway, he thought, an all the trouble is ahead, all the bushes, all the small ravines, a the close cover waiting for us, and Cheddi has not blown his horn Harry stumbled. He fell against her, and she caught hin "Tired?"

He was abominably tired and lame.

"Hand on my shoulder," Christian whispered, and the scen came close to him. He put his left hand on her shoulder. Th right would have been better, but he had to keep his right sid free. His left hand fitted on the roundness of her shoulder, firm She touched his hand with hers; the palm of her hand was we She took her hand away, and they went on.

*Thou saidest: I am sick of love.* Let me try to think of that t fight my fear.

Bapu stopped. He cast about. He went a few yards on, an then came back. "Sahib, the Bad One has come to here. Th Bad One has chased the horse and then gone yonder." He wave palm upwards, to the right.

Christian's shoulder trembled in the hollow of his hand. He child, her only son, had ridden that horse this afternoon. He hel her shoulder. But it was no good. He was terrified. He coul not think.

Bapu moved again. He was the leader of this expedition, th jungle man named Bapu. The brightness of the torch in blackness stars in the path-slit in the sky. Not a leaf stirred in the fores Bapu breathed—hiss, r.minative hiss. Christian breathed—sig shallow sigh. Harry's heart raced on.

"Here the Bad One came onto the path at great speed from th left side, and here the horse came onto the path from the right sid

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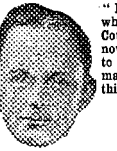

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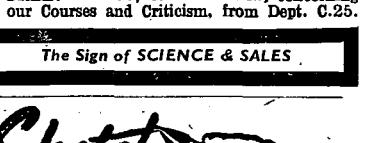


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The Bad One's charge failed here. But, sahib, the horse would not have come here straightly from the right side, for the jungle is too thick beyond. The horse must have swung from the path and swung back. There is a likely place where the path goes round the banyan tree. There the Bad One may have lain in wait, and there the horse may first have seen the Bad One, and there the Baba may have been thrown down." *Baba*, he said. The baby. Her ewe-lamb.

"The Bad One left the horse," continued Bapu, dispassionate small genius. Bapu's breath was bad.

"What does he say?"

"He says it may have happened just ahead."

"Can't we call?"

Christian waved the torch round now, all round the haphazard wall of jungle close about them, silent bush and silent tree, still leaf and broken grass, illuminated, gone again, but crowding closer in the blackness.

"Bapu, should we call the Baba now?"

"Sahib, if the Bad One is here, the Bad One knows that we are here. Call, therefore!"

"Michael!" she called in her own voice in the night. "Michael, Michael darling!"

"Michael!" he called—like a crow, it sounded. "Michael boy! It's Harry."

Nothing . . . Nothing . . . Nothing . . .

★ ***The Third (and last) Part of "Harry Black," by David Walker, appears in next month's Argosy on sale February 10.***

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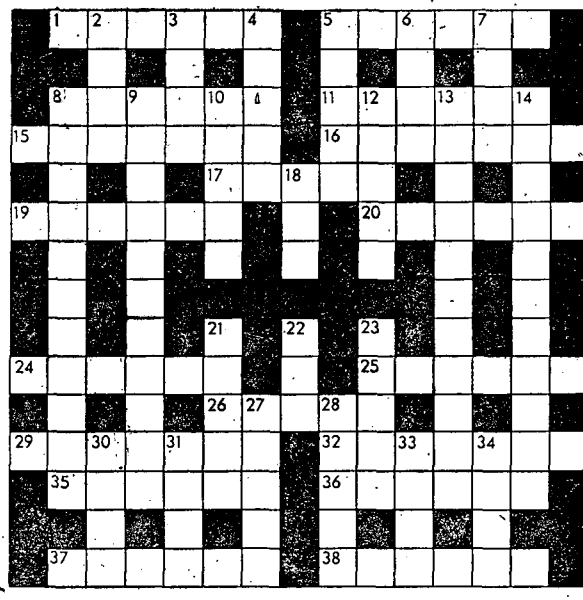
# ARGOSY CROSS-WORD

★

Solution on Page 103

★



## CLUES

### Across

1 The little saint leads a troubled life (6).

5 An artist in numbers at last ! (6).

8 Make a vulgar fuss ? (6).

11 They used mistletoe, not for kissing (6).

15 It pulls cart backwards to hill (6).

16 Grooved county (6).

17 " And I would that my tongue could ——" (Tennyson) (5).

19 Clever (6).

20 Stage whispers ? (6).

24 Coastal curves sound dangerous (6).

25 Nasal noises from a banjo (6).

26 The offspring is a girl (5).

29 This stone's gift is the gab (7).

32 Goddess of doom (7).

35 A V.I.P. bee makes this sort of honey (6).

36 Most of your clothes can be put in it (6).

37 Not a quickstep—a short street roll ? (6).

38 It's the majority that does it (6).

### Down

2 Irish kings were crowned in its halls (4).

3 If reversed at last makes a decree (4).

4 Try and do it ! (5).

5 Military nucleus (5).

6 To border on a contradiction ? (4).

7 A girl and I in opera (4).

8 Good tenants show them, perhaps, to get a sliced rent (11).

9 Faint 25 in 2 down (4, 2, 1, 4).

10 Mixed drink (5).

12 Mostly mountainous country (5).

13 The title is real but they can't read it (11).

14 Feign zest in hay fever ? (8-3).

18 In boot or hat ? (3).

21 Rosie's changed—she's willowy ! (5).

22 Little sister's the same either way (3).

23 Captain Flint might be a foe worthy of it ? (5).

27 The girl, not the hag (5).

28 Mum's brother (5).

30 Charley's ? (4).

31 Create emperor from mutiny (4).

33 Shake the tome, there's a speck of dust (4).

34 " I —— thee late a rosy wreath," (Jonson) (4).

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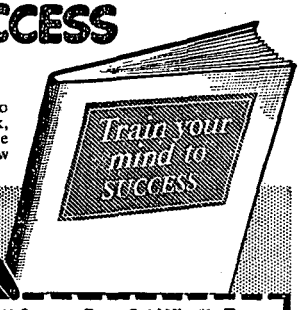


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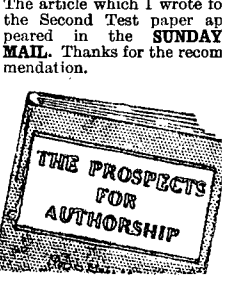


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